

# **A Book of Simple Truths**

The book that *will* change your life

“Life is simple, yet we insist on making it complicated.” -Confucius

The truth to life is simple, but it takes work to implement. Yet, a lot of material out there (health, self-help, etc.) makes it sound like there is a secret, complicated formula to life that is, somehow, easy to implement once you know it. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are no secrets to life.

But with so much misinformation out there, it might be hard to see that nowadays. So here are some well researched topics that cut through the BS and gets to the heart of the matter.

If you read this book all the way through, it *will* change your life. Certainly, it won't be overnight, but if you read it all it'll get you to change a habit here and there, which will add up to a better life.

This book is actually four different materials all in one.

## **Contents**

Is Meat Good or Bad? (Book)

The Case Against Television (Paper)

The Last Self-Help Book (Book)

To Adult Children (Paper)

While the last one might seem like an unusual inclusion, with electronics and helicopter parents nowadays I think we'll be having a lot more adult children. You might even be an adult child and not even know it. Anyway, I think it is worth checking out.



# Is Meat Good or Bad?

Learn What Modern Science Has  
to Say About Animal Products





# **Is Meat Good or Bad?**

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Always consult with your doctor before changing your diet.



# Preface

I hesitated for a bit to give this special acknowledgement at the front of the book as if you're familiar with his work, it reveals the answer to the title of the book (but so will reading the table of contents). I wanted the answer to be a gradual one emerging from solid scientific evidence and critical thinking. But I know it is the right thing to do.

This book stands on the shoulders of another man's work. When I wrote the original book I wanted it to be the shortest and most concise reading material possible that still answered the question once and for all. While I did my own research, I needed the best evidence out there to convince people, so I had to use this person's material. The vast majority of the studies as well as many arguments used in the original book (the first half of the current book) and a good number of the studies (and I probably used some of his arguments there as well) from the new chapter (the last half of the book) comes from Dr. Michael Greger's lifework so far. I say "so far" as he's still working hard researching and creating new material. He also has a team of volunteers who I'm certain deserve praise for their hard work as well. So thank you Dr. Greger and team for everything you do in the name of health science and for the good of the public.

Dr. Greger, if you're reading this, while I know people often use your research without giving you proper credit, I think everyone in the community knows who the real hero is.

This book was written independently and without the knowledge of anyone mentioned within. As such, any errors found in this book are mine and mine alone.

Finally, this last version of the book should always be free. It's copyrighted, but you may make as many copies as you want to give to others.

Enjoy!





# Dying Without Warning

I couldn't believe the news. The father of one of my friends died. And he was only in his early 50s.

The guy wasn't a health nut, but he never had any serious health issues and he definitely made time for the gym. And at that gym, he played a game of basketball with his son. After, he said he overdid it and had to sit down only to die of a massive heart attack moments later in the arms of his son.

When they opened him up, his arteries were clogged with plaque.

It is a pretty scary concept, to have a heart attack that kills you without warning.

And with coronary heart disease (narrowing of the arteries to the heart from plaque) being the number one killer for men and women in America and the world, it is way more common than you think.

*Not an issue for me, I exercise regularly and eat healthy.*

Exercise may not be enough. We are seeing presumably fit people dying. And the "healthy" diet you are consuming may be the reason you will have a heart attack one day.

You could be jogging one moment, only to be dead the next.

But there is an explanation for everything. And using science, we can explain and prevent heart disease. So let's crack open this book and find out how not to be a victim of a heart attack.

# Extra, Extra, Read All About It: Are You a Victim of Headline Science?

Headline science, the most popular science of all time.

Why read an article when you can just read the headline?

Like this one from *The New York Times*:

"Eating Vegetables Doesn't Stop Cancer"

Thanks headline science! I'll make sure all my friends know this amazing fact.

And this one:

"Fruits and Vegetables Do More to Reduce Cancer and Extend Life than Many Prescription Drugs"

Wait... I thought vegetables do nothing against cancer (trust me, they do). How do you know which one is telling the truth?

I guess you'll have to read the articles, the studies they cite, do a bit of research yourself, and do some critical thinking of your own.

(Turns out that the study *The New York Times* cited did find an inverse relationship between fruit and vegetable consumption and cancer (i.e., vegetables prevent cancer), but it was smaller than expected. So to say eating your vegetables will not help stop cancer is twisting the truth. But, hey, anything to sell papers.)

Let's talk at a high level how scientists do their research to better understand things.

It doesn't always follow this format, but this is how it usually works.

First, there are the *observational* studies.

You are viewing the world around you and trying to find correlations. So something like a survey would be an observational study. And maybe an observation in a survey finds vegetable consumption coincides with better athletic performance in a population.

Once they find correlations, they then see if there is causation.

This is where *experimental* studies come in.

They create controlled experiments to recreate and explain the link. Health scientists can do this by conducting a trial with people (e.g., have a group of people increase vegetable consumption and a control group that doesn't). After that, they'll try to recreate the chemical reactions happening in the body in a laboratory to completely understand what is going on.

But those molecular studies explain *why* something happens in our bodies. The experimental studies, however, show that it *does* happen, which makes them the most important. While the observational studies show that something *might* be happening inside our bodies, which is why observational studies are never enough.

(Technically, molecular studies can be experimental or observational in nature, but let's not get too bogged down with the details here.)

Of course, one experimental study isn't ever enough. So you want several and you want to vary them so you can narrow down what is happening.

You can get more specific by using only certain vegetables, having participants do only certain exercises to test athletic performance, etc. You get more narrow until you can explain your observations.

And when we do that we find out great things about our health like beet consumption being an amazing booster to athletic performance.[1],[2]

But when you only start and end with an observational study, that is just bad science. But the unethical media loves bad science to stir up controversy and attract readers.

And if people only read the headline, they'll never know if it is bad science or not.

Like this one:

"Vegetarians Less Healthy, Lower Quality Of Life Than Meat-Eaters"

But if you look at the study (a telephone survey in Australia), the author said there was no known causation between being a vegetarian and a lower-quality or less healthy life. There is a correlation, but, as the author notes, that correlation could be explained by the fact unhealthy and depressed people turned to a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle hoping to feel better. But they weren't for sure. Why? Because this was an *observational* study. We need to follow up with experimental studies.

But putting the truth in a headline that doesn't shock people won't get readers.

Could you imagine:

"Small Phone Survey Showed Some Vegetarians Do Have a Lower Quality of Life and Health (Might be Due to Unhealthy and Depressed People Trying the Lifestyle for the First Time to Help Themselves). Follow Up Studies Needed."

No magazine would run that.

Fine, but don't let yourself fall victim to headline science. Read and be critical.

The same goes with this book. Read it all, check the studies I cite, compare what I say with contradictory evidence and other written material, and then make up your mind.

I hope you enjoy the book!

# Does Red Meat Kill You?

Ah, the most evil of all animal products—especially when processed. Or is it?

Well, if you believe what the government and what a lot of research institutions say, then red meat is clearly bad for you. However, people advocating a diet based on meat and animal products argue that the government and those institutions have no idea what they are talking about.

When answering health questions, it is best to look very broadly at the evidence and then narrow our focus to explain the observations. But in both situations, you always want to look at the science.

So let's take a 10,000-foot view with a 100,000+ participant study.

## The Big Picture

In 2012, a group of Harvard researchers published a study showing red meat consumption shortened your life. A group of 121,342 participants were followed for about 30 years. It concluded that not only did it shorten your life but it also caused other health problems (like cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer).[3] Harvard has even said that "healthy meat consumption" is clearly an oxymoron.

So how much red meat was needed to impact mortality? About 3 ounces a day, roughly the size of a deck of cards. Keep in mind, that was *unprocessed* red meat. Of course, processed red meat was even worse.

*But that's just one study!*

True. But instead of telling you, again, it was over 100,000 people, over 30 years of data, and it was done by Harvard (I doubt they would drop the ball on this one), I'll refer to a bigger study.

How about the EPIC study with over 500,000 participants (448,568 by the end of the study).[4]



What did they find?

Red meat consumption is linked to a higher mortality rate.

*Wait, the conclusion said only processed meat had a link!*

Okay, let's back up here. I'll give you the exact quote.

"After multivariate adjustment, a high consumption of red meat was related to higher all-cause mortality, and the association was stronger for processed meat."

Multivariate adjustment means they controlled for factors that might throw off the conclusion (like their age, whether they smoked or not, family history of death, etc.). So we have the same results as the Harvard study.

Red meat consumption is clearly linked even when you adjust for other factors.

*Why does the conclusion not say that?*

They also did what they called a "measurement error correction."

But here is the thing, they didn't correct for any known errors. They randomly sampled a small percentage of the survey and asked them to do a 24-hour recall of food they ate. In other words, they asked them to remember what they ate the previous day. And 24-hour recalls have been proven to not be very accurate at times. They should have monitored their food consumption instead.

In theory, the results from the smaller sample size group should be more accurate than the survey, but even then it doesn't fairly represent the errors made by the 500,000 as a whole. The errors made by the 500,000 might have been, overall, the exact opposite (e.g., the smaller sample group reported more meat consumption on the survey than they actually ate, while the 500,000, as a whole, reported less meat consumption than they actually ate.)

*That does seem a little odd. But they're the scientist, I'm sure they know what they're doing here.*

Keep in mind, in this massive study there were about 40 organizations that contributed financially and about 50 authors. While the study claimed no competing interest, it is pretty common to have these organization and authors be paid by different industries (maybe not for this one study but other studies authors have done in the past, other studies they hope to be funded in the future, and for donations that some of these organizations would want to receive in the future), which include ones like the dairy, the pork, and the beef industry, while not mentioning it. So there is often pressure to soften the blow on findings that look bad for their financial contributors or for potential financial contributors.

But the main problem here is this is an observational study. You want to find correlations to follow up on with experimental studies. You do not want to get rid of them. And, clearly, there is a correlation between red meat and mortality.

*I don't know. Sounds like you are trying to find correlations that might not be there.*

Okay, how about another study with another 500,000 people? The NIH-AARP study.

What did they find? The same thing. Both red meat and processed meat increased total mortality, cancer mortality, and cardiovascular disease mortality.[5]

Now we have three separate studies with sample sizes ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 people showing a link between red meat and increased mortality and disease.

*Yeah, but isn't that because they are eating grain-fed, hormone injected meat? Grass-fed, red meat from wild animals might not have those problems.*

The experimental studies, the only studies we really care about, show no difference between those types of red meat. I'll get into it later, but we have studies showing how even these "clean" sources of meat create essentially the same health problems.

For now, let's get into the specifics why red meat is bad for you.

*Wait! I have a study with over 1,000,000 people showing no unhealthy link to red meat! Just processed!*[6]

Like I said those big studies are there to just help us decide what to investigate. We shouldn't take them as fact or by themselves as good science.

But, okay, let's look at that study. It was a review study. In other words, they looked at different studies and drew their conclusions from there.

Out of 1,500 studies to review, they picked 20. Keep in mind, 17 of the 20 studies reviewed were observational studies. Because of the number of factors we don't know about or cannot control in observational studies, we expect them to not always agree with each other.

And they only looked at stroke, coronary heart disease, and diabetes, not cancer or mortality rates. I never made an argument about diabetes so let's put that to the side. We'll look at your study in regard to showing no link with red meat to stroke or coronary heart disease.

Let's make sure we are on the same page here. Arterial plaque is the only cause of coronary heart disease (our number one killer in the world) and virtually the only cause of heart attacks. Arterial plaque is also the primary, but not only, cause of stroke (our second most common killer). Let's look at stroke first.

Of those 20 studies, only 3 looked at the association between stroke and red meat consumption. That would make the sample size much smaller than 1,000,000 people. And all 3 were observational studies.

Let's take a closer look at those three studies.

The first one was done in Japan looking at people who were exposed to atomic bomb radiation. Not exactly the best sample population. And the institute that did the study is focused on caring for radiation exposure victims, not dietary health. Finally, animal consumption was *not* associated with preventing strokes caused by blocked arteries (which

accounts for about 85% of strokes). It only *appears* protective against Hemorrhagic Stroke (which occurs when a weakened blood vessel ruptures and accounts for about 13% of strokes).

The second study was *against* red meat consumption, "These data suggest that a dietary pattern typified by higher intakes of red and processed meats, refined grains, and sweets and desserts may increase stroke risk, whereas a diet higher in fruits and vegetables, fish, and whole grains may protect against stroke."

The third study looked at middle-aged men in the United States. The problem with this study has to do with the fact that once you are in that age range a lot of damage to your body has already been done (things like calcification of atherosclerosis plaque happens more in older people and takes longer to treat). In other words, if they started to increase or decrease red meat consumption, it may not make much of a difference right away (at least not during the length of the study). This is the "sick population" argument (an important concept to understand in health science), which I'll talk more about later.[7]

*So what about the Japanese study you mentioned that showed animal products were protective against Hemorrhagic Stroke - the cause of 13% of strokes?*

So is red meat and/or saturated fat protective against strokes? Overall, most likely not (I'll talk more about this in detail). However, I think it is the B12 in red meat that is showing the protective or neutral effect with this one type of stroke. B12 protects arteries from homocysteine toxins, which could explain the inverse relationship found.[8]

But that you can supplement for cheap. (B12 is one of the cheapest supplements you can buy.)

(For those of you who don't know, B12 is made by bacteria. And those bacteria are mostly found in your colon. But your colon can't absorb the B12 already in it so it has to find a way from your anus to your mouth—gross. Certain animals are ruminants, like cows, that can absorb the B12 they produced due to their unique digestive tract. But all other farm animals, like pigs, have B12 because they live in such filthy

environments—their feces eventually get in their mouths—or because of supplementation. If you're wondering how we used to get B12 without farm animals or how the rest of the world gets it, one reason is that they eat bugs, which are full of B12. Even the Bible talks about what bugs people ate back in the day. And since everything was filthier back then with feces and dirt (the bacteria that makes the B12 in your gut came from the dirt), everything they ate, especially from nature, probably had a ton of B12 in it. But eating from nature can also get you sick with other bacteria, so it's probably best to just supplement.)

But why get B12 from an unhealthy source? Would you drink a healthy green smoothie that is laced with poison? Eating red meat for B12 doesn't make any sense. And even omnivores (meat and plant eaters) have been shown to be deficient. So supplementation is best for everyone.

*But what about the findings on coronary heart disease?*

The analysis of coronary heart disease included 4 studies when it came to red meat. So in regard to coronary heart disease, the study size is also much smaller. 3 of them were observational and 1 was experimental. The experimental study (again, the only studies we really care about) *did* find that red meat causes coronary heart disease.

For the three observational studies, I think the "sick population" argument, which, again, I'll talk about later in the specifics section, easily explains the inconsistencies between observational studies. And before you say we don't have a sick population, keep in mind coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death not just in the United States but in the world.

Furthermore, with observational studies, it's easy to present the data or create surveys that are confusing for both the readers and the people participating in the studies. And when you consider that many authors are paid by certain industries hoping for certain findings, you can see the problem with observational studies.

Finally, the study you found was done by a Harvard professor some time ago. Yet, Harvard's stance is still to avoid red meat. If that study had more merit, don't you think Harvard would have changed their position?

Remember, you expect to see inconsistencies between observational studies. There are just too many variables to control for. But you don't end your discussion using observational studies. You go on to the experimental studies. And that is what we are about to do.

So when you look at all the observational studies as a whole, clearly there is a link between red meat consumption, disease, and mortality. Now let's see what is causing that link.

## Specifics

### Cancer

Let's start with cancer.

Does red meat cause cancer?

Looking at the Harvard study again, red meat has been linked to colorectal cancer, but how?

According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, heme iron (what makes red meat red) damages the lining of the colon.

*But my trainer says that is the best kind of iron!*

First, you have to understand that iron is both good and bad for us. We need it to make red blood cells to carry oxygen, but it also causes oxidative stress. And oxidative stress damages your body.

This heme iron is a type of iron your body can't regulate. Since it is already wrapped in hemoglobin, it can easily pass through your colon and then into your blood. Trainers and meat advocates call it high absorbing, but not really. Your body simply can't keep it out of your system. Forced absorbing would be a better term. Even if you are at toxic levels, your body has no way to keep heme iron out of your system.



Plant-based iron (non-heme iron) *is* regulated by your body. If your body needs more, it absorbs more. If your body doesn't need as much, it absorbs less.

While non-heme iron has several systems to regulate it, heme iron appears to hijack the protein system used by your body to move your own hemoglobin and oxygen around and force itself into your colon cells and blood. While heme absorption is dependent on the presence of these hemoglobin related proteins and the levels of these proteins probably have something to do with your need for oxygen/hemoglobin, you could argue that there is *some* regulation (though I use that word very loosely here) of heme iron absorption. But it's nothing compared to the regulation of iron found in plants.[9][10]

But keep in mind, we *need* tight regulation of our iron levels. Why? Because our bodies have no good way to get rid of the excess. While woman can get rid of some through their periods, neither gender really evolved anything to get rid of excess iron in our bodies. Given iron's pro-oxidant effect, this might explain why donating blood as little as twice a year is linked to a decrease in cancer and mortality rates.[11]

Given that information, I would advise you to donate blood when you can. Not only could you save someone's life but you might just save your own.

So the heme iron found in red meat and the oxidative damage it does to your cells might explain this link to cancer.

*Look! I found a study showing red meat does not cause colon cancer!*[12]

First, they never said red meat doesn't cause colon cancer. They said, in their opinion, that there were so many factors you cannot definitely pin it on red meat. I disagree with their opinion, but I'll return to that later. For now, let's look at who did the study.

One of the authors, Alexander, works at a for-profit corporation (Exponent, Inc.) traded on NASDAQ. They are a consulting firm for different industries. You typically see them refuting evidence made by the media when it makes a company look bad (e.g., Dateline's report on the

explosiveness of Chevrolet's fuel tanks and Consumer Report's findings on Suzuki's roll-over safety).

I'm not saying the author had an alternative motive, but it certainly does raise a red flag. (In my personal experience working at a firm that consulted for different companies, we were as aggressive as possible to please our clients.)

Furthermore, this summary review only looked at observational studies, not experimental studies (are you starting to see a trend here with these pro-meat studies?). The problem with observational studies agrees with their conclusion: you can only show *potential* factors as there are too many factors present in any group you study to give a definite answer.

(Please note, people who do these studies understand this and try to account for it by researching alternative explanations and by using mathematical models to control for disruptive influences. But still, you can only get to *potential* factors.)

But let's do a better job than summarizing some observational studies. Let's look at some meta-analysis studies (review studies that look at *all* the studies done on a topic). Not just one meta-analysis, but three, all done by different authors and independent of each other. What did they find? All of them showed eating red meat caused a 20-30% increased chance of getting colon cancer.[13] Keep in mind, they only used studies they considered high quality (i.e., ones that best controlled for other potential factors). So, without a doubt, red meat consumption is a potential factor in causing colon cancer.

(If you want to know more about meta-analysis studies, they find all the studies on a given topic and apply statistics to determine which ones to look at closer and which ones to give more weight to when calculating everything.)

Now, let's look at the experimental data. The experimental and molecular studies clearly show that red meat causes colon cancer.[14] It all goes back to the heme iron. The heme iron creates free radicals (hydroxyl radicals, which are extremely strong) that are genotoxic (causes DNA damage) to your colon. The heme iron also creates fat peroxidation,

which produces chemicals that aren't just genotoxic, but also appear to promote the growth of tumors in the colon. It is even worse with cured (processed) meat as the heme iron also creates N-nitroso compounds (also genotoxic).

There you have it. The experimental studies perfectly explain our observational findings: red meat causes colon cancer and processed red meat is even worse.

Both the observational data and the experimental data support the fact that red meat is clearly a significant cause of colorectal cancer.

And it doesn't matter if it is grass-fed, that "superior" meat still has heme iron in it.

Now there are also other ingredients in meat that, in general, seem to have a pro-cancer effect (e.g., Neu5Gc, PhIP, polycyclic, aromatic hydrocarbons, L-carnitine, leucine, advanced glycation end products, and arachidonic acid) by either feeding cancer cells, causing DNA damage, causing inflammation, and/or accelerating the aging process.

I'll talk more about some of these later on, but keep in mind red meat either has these ingredients or creates them during the cooking process (and, again, it doesn't matter if it is grass-fed or not).

Between heme iron and all these other ingredients, it is no wonder that we have a clear link between red meat consumption and cancer.

## **Cardiovascular Disease**

On to the next subject and back to getting strokes and coronary heart disease.

The problem probably has to do with all the saturated fat in red meat (which is also found in just about all animal products) producing atherosclerosis plaque in our arteries.

*But people keep telling me saturated fat is good for you!*

Let's talk about the heart surgeon Doctor Esselstyn to answer that. On a mission to stop coronary heart disease, he started advising patients on what to eat. And by using MRI scans on them, he showed that a diet that is free of animal products (saturated fat) and low-fat in general would open up the arteries. The MRI scans show the arteries going from being barely open to completely dilated.

I don't know what else is more convincing than that. You can literally see the arteries opening up once you remove saturated fat from the diet (FYI, with the exception of coconuts, a few nuts, and the microscopic amounts in other plant foods, saturated fats only come from animal sources).

*What about the Masai? They eat almost nothing but animal products and they show no sign of heart disease.*

But the Masai tribe of Africa burns calories like elite athletes. They don't have jobs where they sit around all day. They never stop moving.

(Saturated fat is an energy source. And that molecule is broken down, specifically to water and carbon dioxide, when it is converted to energy. And that's why exercise will work to get rid of body fat. Unfortunately, it takes a lot of exercising to get rid of a decent amount of fat. You're better off just restricting the calories you eat. And saturated fat, which pretty much only comes from animal products, is the most calorically dense macronutrient out there.)

And, still, a study done of their bodies (autopsy examinations) clearly showed that their arteries are caked with atherosclerosis plaque (equivalent to that of an old man raised on a Western diet).[15] Keep in mind, their meats are not processed and their animals are fed off the natural vegetation found in the area. So grain-fed meat isn't the problem here. Their constant activity is what probably keeps coronary heart disease at bay (barely). Working out all day long isn't an option for most people.

And other studies show even if you work out like a marathon runner, a person eating a diet free of animal products (vegan), without the crazy exercise, will still have less atherosclerosis plaque.[16]

Besides the Masai, if you look at different preagricultural, hunter-gatherer tribes and ancient civilizations, they also suffered from atherosclerosis.[17]

I'll take it one step further. Compare the Masai people in Africa to the Bantu people in Africa who eat mostly a vegan diet. Their autopsy reports showed only one *potential* case of coronary heart disease in 1,328 bodies examined.[18] That means the Bantu have clean, healthy arteries.

And it isn't limited to the Bantu. For all cultures who rely solely on or almost solely on plant foods to obtain their nutrition, heart disease becomes virtually nonexistent (like the poor class in India[19] and China[20] before the Western diet was introduced). But once the food changes to a meat-based diet, heart disease starts to show up.

We see that plaque, by looking at autopsies, comes in once their diet changes. And the *only* thing that causes coronary heart disease is the buildup of atherosclerosis plaque. And, remember, coronary heart disease is the number one killer in the world.[21]

I think why you see such a clear difference between the Masai and Bantu, and not in all observational studies, has to do with the "sick population" argument. Basically, if you have a population already eating a lot of red meat and possessing thick layers of plaque in their arteries from decades of bad diet, you may not see much of a difference when you add some more or reduce meat consumption for a few months as these people are already "sick" with arterial plaque. And arterial plaque doesn't disappear overnight. Dr. Esselstyn's MRI scans of arteries opening up were over a period of 3 to 5 years (though the benefits and reduction of plaque certainly happen sooner than that, there's probably still enough plaque there to rupture, cause a blood clot, and thus a heart attack) and that was with a very low-fat, vegan diet. Plus, some studies might have people reduce animal products and saturated fat, but then they end up eating more processed foods and trans fat (hydrogenated plant oils that are as bad or worse than saturated fat when it comes to heart disease). Processed foods aren't as much of a factor when comparing the Masai to the Bantu.

There has been a number of systematic reviews (reviews of only high-quality studies) and meta-analysis studies done between 1994 and 2014 (20 years) looking at saturated fat and the findings of the studies were, overall, that reducing or replacing saturated fats with plant-based fats (that *aren't* hydrogenated and especially when in their whole food form like nuts) leads to a decrease in cardiovascular disease.

But people are quick to point out just one of those studies from 2014 in the Annals of Internal Medicine showing no link. And the media makes sure to create those sensational headlines with it (more headline science).

The problem with the 2014 study has to do with how each person is different. Every person has a natural cholesterol set point. Yours might naturally be at 170 while another person's is naturally at 130. While we know through the experimental studies that eating less saturated fat means lower cholesterol levels and more saturated fat means higher cholesterol levels, comparing one person's cholesterol levels to another person's levels, especially in an observational study, would make it much harder to draw that conclusion. But that's what a cross-sectional study does. And guess what kind of studies were used in the 2014 meta-analysis study? Cross-sectional. Not only that, but the 2014 study was essentially a rehash of a 2010 meta-analysis study done by a man who is funded by the dairy and beef industry. It seems like the study was designed to be bad science from the beginning to confuse the public.

Furthermore, the 2014 Annals of Internal Medicine study has been criticized for having errors, omissions of key studies, and failing to mention how they picked their studies for review. No wonder Harvard came out and said that the study was "seriously misleading and should be disregarded."

The experimental studies (not just the *good* observational studies), specifically controlled trials where they lock people up and control what they eat, support the fact that saturated fat increases plaque in your arteries.[22] In general, lipids (e.g., fats) are carried to arteries by the protein LDL and the protein HDL removes the lipids from the arteries. And it has been shown that overall with experimental studies, saturated fats



increase the amount of LDL in your blood while monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats increase HDL.

When you look at the weight of the evidence (Dr. Esselstyn's work and MRI scans, the Masai and Bantu people, ancient hunter-gatherer civilizations, compare marathon runners to sedentary vegans, and the best meta-analysis studies done) there is no doubt animal products contribute a great deal of plaque to your artery walls.

Most likely it is the saturated fat. But even if it is somehow not the saturated fat, a diet based on animal products (including red meat) clearly adds plaque to your arteries. Period.

But it gets even worse with red meat.

There is a chemical called Neu5Gc that primates (like us) lost the ability to make. This is most likely a good thing as it is believed to cause chronic inflammation due to an antibody reaction which might feed tumors and cause atherosclerosis.[23],[24]

The science on Neu5Gc is in its infancy, but the link seems very strong.

Furthermore, our diet containing Neu5Gc from eating other mammals (e.g., red meat) might explain why humans get rheumatoid arthritis, while our primate cousins do not. And it would also explain why arthritis sufferers feel better when meat is removed from the diet.

But, hey, if you want to be like the several meat-based diet advocates who have died of a heart attack (I won't name names out of respect for their families), then go ahead and eat meat. These diet gurus are dying in their 50s!

And exercise is generally not enough to prevent heart attack (unless you are working out like the Masai). The man who was accredited with starting America's fitness and jogging revolution died at age 52 of a heart attack. He thought diet wasn't nearly as important as exercising consistently. When they opened him up, he had 70-95% blockage of major coronary arteries. Exactly what Dr. Esselstyn would see time and time again during his open heart surgeries.

Now compare those heart attack victims to Doctor Ancel Keys. He was the original advocate of replacing animal fats with plant fats and having a low-fat diet (the guy many Paleo/Primal advocates say screwed up the public with "bad health information"). Do you know how old he was when he died? He was over 100. And what about his wife who co-authored his books and also did his diet? 97.

Who do you want to be?

## **Inflammation**

I know people tend to think that meat, especially red meat, is needed to build strength, to be muscular, and to have high testosterone levels. It's not. In fact, many male vegans (people who don't eat animal products) report higher testosterone levels than men who eat meat (it's probably due to vegan bodies working at their optimum since saturated fat isn't clogging everything). Another misconception is that inflammation is good for building our bodies. But, in general, inflammation should be avoided as in the long-term it will damage and age us.

And animal products have always been associated with inflammation, but the science explaining it is pretty new.

The big cause of inflammation seems to be dead bacteria in animal products (including unspoiled products) when you eat them. Doesn't matter if you cook it to a crisp or expose it to acid (like your stomach), the dead bacteria are still there. And they get absorbed with the fat in your food into your blood. Then your immune system detects the dead bacteria, reacts to it as if it was alive, and starts the inflammation process throughout your body. And that process can last for hours.[25]

*What about bacteria found on plant food?*

Well, typically, those are the bacteria naturally found in our guts (that's where they came from). So they are usually good bacteria (and microbes can rarely attack both plants and animals), thus our immune system shouldn't see them as a threat.

*What about E. coli?*

*E. coli* comes from fecal matter. Any plants containing *E. coli* were probably cross-contaminated with animal waste.

So think about it, when you include meat in every meal your body is in a constant state of inflammation throughout the day. When you consider that continuous inflammation is linked to organ failure, joint damage, and maybe all forms of chronic disease, that isn't a good thing.[26]

*...but my meat is grass-fed.*

Again, this does not matter. Grass-fed or not, it still has the same dead bacteria and thus still causes inflammation in our bodies. There is even a study that shows wild, grass-fed animal meat causes inflammation in our bodies once we consume it.[27]

And don't forget about Neu5Gc. Since Neu5Gc has only been found in mammals, up to this point, red meat should cause even more inflammation than other animal products.

The bottom line is all meat equals inflammation.

# Chicken: Finger Licking Good (Plus Cancer)

*Certainly, low-fat, white meat is a safe alternative.*

Nope, I would even say it is worse.

Let's see why chicken is so bad.

## Not a Safe Alternative to Red Meat

As you probably already know, over-cooking meat (especially at high temperatures) can create body-damaging, cancer-causing chemicals to form. One of these is called advanced glycation end products (AGEs) known for its highly oxidative damage to cells and is believed to contribute to the aging process. After testing 500+ foods, do you know which one came out with the most AGEs per serving? BBQ Chicken.[28]

But it isn't just AGEs that are formed with chicken.

Heterocyclic amines (HCAs) are carcinogens that are usually formed only when meat is cooked at a high temperature (like pan frying or barbecuing). However, chicken has been shown to create these HCAs including PhIP (a very dangerous HCA when it comes to breast cancer) at even low temperatures.[29]

Keep in mind, these chemicals created from cooking have been linked to kidney cancer, colon cancer, lung cancer, and pancreatic cancer (a cancer that is rapidly fatal in most cases).

And virtually all animal products can form these chemicals when cooked. Just more reason to stay away from animal products altogether.

(When you pick your poison, HCAs are found in higher amounts in meats that are cooked at higher temperatures or cooked well done. However, the less you cook your meat the more you risk *E. coli* and parasitic infection. Again, your best option is to just stay away from it all together.)

And speaking of pancreatic cancer, the NIH-AARP study showed a link between animal fat and pancreatic cancer, but no association with plant fats.

Furthermore, two other studies showed an association between pancreatic cancer and animal protein and animal sugar (lactose, which is only found in milk). Just another reason to stay away from all animal products.[30],[31]

But I digress. Back to chicken!

It has been found out that many cancers are methionine dependent (methionine is an amino acid). In other words, without that amino acid they would die. If you want to restrict methionine in your diet, stay away from animal products. They contain far more methionine than plant foods. However, chicken, turkey, egg whites, and fish vastly beat out all other animal products for methionine levels.[32]

And in a random sample of chicken at grocery stores, one study showed over half of the purchased chicken meat contained unnaturally high levels of inorganic, cancer-causing arsenic (probably due to the arsenic-based feed additives and drugs used on the chickens).[33]

Chicken has way too many harmful chemicals in it.

## **Chicken = Penis Cancer?**

So here is another interesting thing about chicken, it has quite a bit of viruses that are harmful to humans.

These viruses seem to promote cancer in the human body. And this might explain why chicken is linked to blood cancer (lymphoma).[34]

And high cancer rates (including penis cancer) were found with those who worked with chicken.[35] My guess is they handled one kind of chicken all day to then handle another kind later that night.

Keep in mind, they take measures to protect themselves, as required by law and company policy, like sanitizing their tools, equipment, and

workline; washing their hands before and after work and their breaks; and wearing industrial rubber gloves that can run up to their elbows over or taped to their disposable jackets. And how much safety do you exercise when you handle raw meat at home?

Chicken isn't just linked to penis cancer, but also to the development of a smaller penis.

Phthalates, especially MEHP, are linked to reduced penis size if it was in the blood of the mother while pregnant.[36] What animal food has the highest level of MEHP? Poultry and eggs.[37]

Besides cancer, poultry workers suffer more from thyroid conditions, schizophrenia, autoimmune neurological disorders, peritonitis, and disease of the kidneys.[38] Again, this is probably due to the microbes that can harm both humans and chickens.

Speaking of microbes, another study showed that about half of all chickens purchased at a grocery store contained *staph* (*Staphylococcus*) bacteria. Turkey was even worst.[39] And *staph* contaminated foods are one of the leading causes of food poisoning resulting in vomiting and diarrhea.

Do you really want to put that stuff in your mouth?

# Fish is a Sponge of Toxic Waste

*But fish is still good for you, right?*

There are probably more chemicals in sea life than any other animal product.

Mercury is still an issue with fish.

And mercury usually takes about one year for the current levels in your body to drop to about 1%. That is the good news. The bad news is other toxic chemicals in fish (dioxins, PCB, and DDE) can take up to 60 years for your body to lower its levels to 1% (based off a 10-year half-life).[40]

(A little more information about the chemicals I just mentioned. They are man-made chemicals created by or used in the manufacturing process or are pesticides we developed. While banned, nature has a hard time breaking them down and, thus, the reason they are still a problem today. They were often leaked into different bodies of water which caused fish and anything that eats fish to contain these chemicals.)

Fish also seem to be the primary source of the obesogen, organotin (endocrine disrupting compounds made of tin and hydrocarbons created for various man-made products), in our diet.[41] Obesogens signal cell receptors to create fat cells.[42]

But these chemicals in fish are nothing to laugh at. They are of real concern to us. For example, not just mercury, but also PCB has been shown to hurt brain development of the fetus.[43]

And mercury's neurological poisoning has been shown to outweigh DHA's benefits to brain development when consumed (DHA, or docosahexaenoic acid, is an omega-3 fatty acid).[44]

*I found this study that says the benefits far outweigh the risks from contaminants.[45]*

Actually, our studies came to the same conclusion, that DHA is important in brain development, but sea life known to have high mercury content

should be avoided by pregnant women. And they suggested no more than two servings per week for pregnant women. Doesn't sound like the benefits *far* outweigh the risks with that advice.

However, my study showed the benefits of DHA don't outweigh the harm of mercury in most fish. In that regard, your study never drew a solid conclusion (it did show some overall benefits for cardiovascular health when looking at contaminants vs. nutrition). And it did include studies that showed mercury was bad for neurological development, but it never drew the conclusion on whether DHA's brain development or mercury's neurological destructiveness was stronger. But you can just take DHA as a supplement without the mercury.

And both studies skip the issue that DHA and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid, another omega-3 fatty acid) don't even come from fish!

They come from algae!

And biomagnification (the increasing concentration of a substance, like mercury, in the tissues of organisms at successively higher levels in a food chain) is the reason fish have such high levels of mercury and other toxins. But if you eat from the bottom of the food chain, you avoid that issue. Just supplement with an algae-based omega-3 product. Why not just cut out the middleman and not worry about mercury, dioxins, DDE, and PCB?

Plus, there is a neurotoxin called BMAA (beta-Methylamino-L-alanine) found in just about all seafood (and freshwater animals) that appears to have a strong link to human diseases that attack the brain and the nervous system like Lou Gehrig's disease, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease. BMAA comes from blue-green algae (not the same type of algae farmed and used to make omega-3 supplements) and since algae is at the bottom of the food chain, every animal from the sea has the BMAA neurotoxin in it to some degree.[46]

And don't worry about plants from the sea. They've been shown to have pretty much no levels of BMAA. Remember, they don't eat other organisms; they get their food from the sun. But all animals from the water eat something smaller than themselves to survive. And since blue-



green algae is at the bottom of the food chain, just about all animals from the sea and even some rivers have some amount of BMAA in them.[47]

(If you're still really worried about consuming algae for your omega-3 requirements, it looks like you might not need to take an algae-based omega-3 supplement to get your DHA and EPA, but I'll talk more about that later into the book).

When you look at mercury, dioxins, PCB, DDE, obesogen, and the neurotoxin BMAA, fish really is a sponge of toxic waste. Stay away from it.

Keep it simple, make your nutrition plant-based. Then you don't have to worry about the toxic effects of animal products.

# The Terrible Edible Egg

*What about eggs? I read an article saying eggs are good for you and the dietary cholesterol isn't bad when it comes to plaque.*

So we know for sure eating saturated fat is bad for our cholesterol levels, but is eating cholesterol itself bad for our cholesterol levels?

Let's take a look.

The “new science” on heart disease says it is not necessarily cholesterol, but inflammation, oxidation, and LDL (which can be broken up further into different sizes, but we are most concerned about the smallest as they can more easily get stuck in the artery walls) that are the problems.

Many people who advocate eating eggs give the following argument: eggs raise primarily the “good” cholesterol (HDL). And it may change small LDL into the larger, safer LDL, making it barely a contributor to any cholesterol driven heart disease (it may even be protective).

First of all, we've already established, when we talked about red meat, that all animal products have dead bacteria that will trigger our immune system and put us in a state of inflammation for hours. If you eat animal products at each meal, then you are pretty much in a chronic state of inflammation. So we are already on our way to heart disease with eggs if a main cause is inflammation.

Next, if you look at this meta-analysis about HDL increase versus LDL increase with egg consumption, the rise in LDL clearly beats the rise in HDL.[48] Yes, it raises HDL, but nothing compared to LDL.

*But it's the big LDL. It isn't nearly as dangerous as the small LDL.*

It is mostly the big LDL that is being increased and you are right that it isn't as dangerous as the small LDL.

But you greatly error by using the word “nearly.”

Small LDL raises your chances of having heart disease by 63%, while the larger LDL raises it by 44%.[49] Those numbers are a little too close for me. Plus, why would I want to consume food that will raise my chances of having heart problems by 44%?

*But this study shows cholesterol levels barely increase overall with egg consumption.*[50]

There has always been a large increase in cholesterol right after egg consumption that will last for several hours.[51] However, a lot of the studies (especially the ones funded by the egg industry) measure these levels after fasting (usually after 8 hours or after sleeping).

And that is why there are so many studies claiming eggs barely increase cholesterol levels.

Plus, it doesn't matter that it eventually lowers within several hours (usually 3 to 7 hours) as it has been clearly shown that chylomicron (mixtures of fat and cholesterol) drip into our arteries after a high cholesterol meal and this chylomicron can build up into atherosclerosis plaque.[52]

Eggs clearly add to your cholesterol and contribute to the buildup of plaque.

By the way, the author of the study you mentioned has been paid by the egg industry (though not specifically for that one study). How much? About \$500,000. You don't think that'll have some influence on how the study is done?

Remember how I talked about the possibility of some authors tweaking their results to please an industry they often get funding from?

*Well, cholesterol levels don't matter. It only matters if the cholesterol is oxidized. Without oxidation, you can't get plaque.*

I won't argue your last point because I don't have to. Dietary cholesterol increases LDL oxidation (by about 40%).[53]

Think about it, if you increase the amount of cholesterol in your system, but the antioxidant levels in your blood stay the same, then that new cholesterol is more likely to oxidize.

*Well, this Harvard study says eggs have no effect on mortality.[54]*

No, it doesn't. It says egg consumption does increase mortality if you eat more than 6 a week. That means you have to eat *less* than one egg a day. And don't people typically eat 2-3 a day for breakfast? For some people, that is 14-21 eggs a week.

If something is bad for you, you don't try to figure out a safe minimum. There is a study showing if a smoker quits before 40, he is likely to live almost as long as a non-smoker.[55] Do we tell our kids, "Hey, you can smoke just quit before 40." No! We tell them to stay away. Same with eggs: stay away.

*What about the lutein and zeaxanthin in eggs to protect your eyes?*

They barely contain lutein and zeaxanthin and those antioxidants originate from plants, not eggs. Again, just cut out the middleman and get your nutrition from the source.

*But isn't the lutein and zeaxanthin in eggs more bioavailable?*

I don't think you understand how little they contain.

You would have to eat over 60 eggs a day to get the daily recommended dose of lutein and zeaxanthin.[56]

*What about the choline in eggs?*

Most people already get enough choline in their diet without eggs. And too much choline is probably bad for you as it is converted to Trimethylamine N-oxide (TMAO), which appears to add plaque to your arteries.[57] So choline would be another reason to avoid eggs for heart health.

*But if I eat eggs once in a while and workout, I'll be fine right?*

Even if you could sidestep the cardiovascular disease issue, you still can't get away from the cancer issue. Just half an egg a day could double your chances of mouth, throat, esophageal, prostate, and bladder cancer, and triple your odds of colon and breast cancer.[58]

This increased cancer rate is speculated to be due to the choline (after it is converted to TMAO) causing inflammation in the body.[59] And wasn't inflammation one of the main causes of cardiovascular disease when it comes to the "new science" of heart disease?

Eggs have also been shown to have industrial toxins like PCB (94% of the eggs tested).[60] PCBs have a dioxin-like effect on the body by interfering with our hormones. PCBs have also been shown to cause cancer in animals.

Finally and another possible explanation for the high cancer rates, just like chicken, eggs contain potent cancer-causing viruses.[61],[62]

Just stay away from eggs.

# Dairy (Far Worse than You Think)

And we have made it to the last category.

Sorry guys, more bad news.

First, let's take a big picture look like we did with red meat.

In a meta-analysis of case-controlled studies (looking at diseased and healthy people and comparing how they lived their lives), dairy consumption was shown to be a risk factor for prostate cancer. In another meta-analysis of prospective studies (following a group of people and waiting to see what kind of diseases they got), dairy consumption was also a risk factor for prostate cancer.[63],[64]

What do they mean by risk factor? Think of smoking for lung cancer. Smoking tobacco is a risk factor for lung cancer. In other words, the more you smoke the more likely you will develop lung cancer. Thus, the more milk, cheese, and other dairy products we consume the more likely we will develop prostate cancer. We'll look at some experimental studies that might explain this later.

So in a way, dairy consumption is just as bad as smoking cigarettes.

But is there a link to other types of cancer?

In another study, they showed a link to milk consumption (from cows) as a child and colorectal cancer as a senior (5,000 people were tracked from 1940 to 2005).[65]

That might sound odd at first, but it isn't surprising. Most forms of cancer get a foothold in our body during growth phases (like puberty). Our body fights it off until we get older and our immunity isn't as strong.

*Is this from the hormones they inject into cows?*

That might be one explanation, but studies have shown that even organic milk promotes cancer growth.

The problem is the estrogen and hormones naturally present in milk (i.e., cows do not have to get injected with hormones to have hormones in their milk). And these chemicals stimulate precancerous cells into invasive cancer cells.[66]

Why? Because milk is for babies. And what do babies want to do? Grow. But this growth signaling from hormones also signals the cancer cells to grow as well. As I mentioned above, it is during our growth phase that cancer takes a foothold in our body.

Another explanation may be IGF-1 (insulin-like growth factor 1). IGF-1 is a hormone in our body that tells us to create more cells. Necessary for when we are growing children to make sure we get bigger, but as adults we don't need it as much. The problem with IGF-1 is it tells all cells to grow (including cancer cells).

Animal protein has been linked to increased IGF-1 levels in the observational studies.[67] And the experimental studies also show that animal protein increases IGF-1 levels.[68]

So not just dairy, but all animal products (red meat, poultry, eggs, fish, and dairy) stimulate cancer growth.

Yet another reason to stay away from all animal products.

Besides cancer, milk has been linked to doubling your risk of heart attack.[69]

And guess which animal product has the most saturated fat? Red meat? Nope. Cheese.

Cheese is the number one source of saturated fat.[70] Milk itself is also very high in saturated fat. Remember how bad saturated fat is for our heart health?

And remember the 2014 Annals of Internal Medicine observational study that *tried* to show no link between saturated fat and cholesterol levels

could be traced back to someone funded by the dairy industry? Follow the money.

And what makes dairy the worst of everything we talked about so far is the addictive nature of the ingredients. This might be explained by the casomorphins (an opioid, similar to morphine, found in milk). That drug is probably there on purpose to make sure the infant calf will drink his milk and bond with its mother. This is supported by the reports of people who can easily give up all other animal products but still crave cheese and dairy after going vegan.

So while each animal product is bad in their own unique way, dairy is probably the worst due to its addictive nature.

So my advice is to not get your kids addicted to a drug.

*But calcium? Where will I get my calcium?*

They looked at lifelong vegan women vs meat-eating women (both in their old age) and they found no difference in bone density.[71] Apparently, the calcium in our greens is enough for healthy bones, even with the oxalates.



# The Final Arguments

*You're cherry picking the studies to find the ones that support your side.*

We looked at extremely large studies (groups of 100,000 to 500,000 participants). We looked at meta-analysis studies. Not just one, but several meta-analysis studies.

And we looked at many studies that meat advocates cite all the time. They simply don't stand up to inspection.

Every time we examine the studies, it turns out they are the ones cherry picking (mostly by using observational studies).

Remember the study advocating fish is okay despite the contaminants, but it actually said to limit fish consumption to two servings per week for pregnant women? Or the so-called "1,000,000 person study" showing red meat didn't cause stroke and coronary heart disease, but the experimental study did show a link and the observational studies were questionable or also showed a link? How about the egg studies where they waited 8 hours after consumption to make it look like cholesterol barely increased? How about when the Masai tribe is given as an example, but the Masai work out like elite athletes and still have arteries caked with atherosclerosis plaque?

*Correlation isn't causation.*

True. But in *observational* studies, it is understood correlation isn't causation.

And that is why we follow up with *experimental* studies to prove our observational studies. And they do exactly that.

Like the extremely large observational studies we just talked about showing red meat being bad for you and processed being even worse. And what did the experimental studies show? The same. Red meat is bad for us and processed meat is even worse.

Furthermore, scientists are able to recreate the chemical reactions that are happening in our bodies to further explain the observational and experimental data. For example, the chemical reactions of heme iron in our colons producing DNA-damaging hydroxyl radicals explains the link between red meat consumption and colorectal cancer. And the additional creation of genotoxic N-nitroso compounds with processed meat explains why it is found to be even worse. All these reactions explain our findings in the observational and experimental studies.

At that point, the “correlation isn’t causation” argument doesn’t have any weight to it.

No more headline science guys. We need the truth if we want progress.

Let’s dedicate ourselves to being great skeptics and critical thinkers.

# What Should I Eat?

This book is about the effects of eating animal products. It is not a diet book.

However, I think I would be doing you a disservice if I didn't provide some guidance.

The foods I eat are based off a lot of research, but still it's just my way of doing it. And I expect a lot of people to disagree with what I say. That's fine. Diet is a complicated issue. This chapter is here to just provide some guidance and to give some ideas you can use to create your own diet.

Do your own research. Be a skeptic of everything, even of the suggestions I give here.

And always consult with your doctor before changing your food habits.

(If this chapter seems like too much to remember, don't worry. I have some easy to follow guides at the back of the book.)

So you have three choices.

- 1.) Keep eating animal products
- 2.) Reduce animal products
- 3.) Eliminate animal products

I won't bother talking about the first option. If you choose to reduce, I think for the most part you should be okay. The less animal products you eat, the more benefits you'll get. But I would make sure to supplement with a B12 vitamin as even some meat-eaters have been shown to be B12 deficient. Still, read what I'm about to say to everyone who will be eliminating animal products from their lives.

If you are going to choose the best option, eliminate animal products, I have a simple guide for you to follow.

First, always go for whole foods. In study after study, they always beat all the other food sources when it comes to health. Even some of the good

stuff in whole foods seem to become toxic to your body when taken by themselves. You need to get your nutrition in its natural form. Your body simply does best with whole foods. This means no processed foods and no oils.

Again, B12 is a must. I would maybe take vitamin D if you don't get much sunlight where you live. If you plan on being a raw vegan, then you might need to supplement your minerals. But I'm not a raw vegan, so please seek advice elsewhere if you plan on going down that path.

If you eat starch heavy vegetables that you have to cook (beans, rice, potatoes, etc.) then you should be fine mineral wise. The same goes with protein. But if you are really worried about minerals or protein (especially if you work out a lot), then just take a protein meal shake. There are a lot of vegan options out there. And you can always stop using it later and see how you feel. (Even if you do work out regularly, I really doubt you *need* a protein shake. Personally, I think they're a waste of money.)

If you're wondering about weight loss, people who turn vegan tend to not only lose a lot of weight in fat but also tend to keep it off. It just has to do with eating whole foods. It's what our bodies are built for. The fiber and synergy of all the phytonutrients (plant chemicals that work with our systems) help our bodies perform at their optimal, which means not being overweight.

That brings me to my next point, eat beans!

Remember Doctor Ancel Keys and his wife who lived so long? They loved beans. They even wrote a book about it, *The Benevolent Bean*.

And we are finding out that beans have amazing properties. Remember how iron is a pro-oxidant? Phytates, naturally found in beans and other vegetables, are antioxidants that specifically work on iron during the digestive process. They can inhibit production of hydroxyl radicals. Yes, phytates (also called phytic acid), what many meat-based diet advocates call an anti-nutrient because it inhibits mineral absorption. But, yet, a high phytate diet has been shown in several studies to decrease osteoporosis.[72],[73],[74]

Yes, some of the minerals will be bound and harder to absorb, but that means you just eat more. And if you combine your beans, and other high phytate foods, with those in the Allium family (e.g., garlic and onion), then the absorption of iron and zinc goes up![75]

And bean consumption is a predictor of a long life. In other words, the more beans you eat the more years you live.[76],[77]

And maybe that is why Ancel Keys lived to be over 100 years old.

It's no coincidence that the people who live in the Blue Zones, the places on Earth with the longest life spans, eat mostly or entirely a plant-based diet and lots of legumes (beans and lentils).

But many Paleo/Primal advocates warn people about the lectins in beans. So lectins are a category of protein. And this category of protein is found in both animals and plants. So technically, there are lectins in animal products as well.

Since it is a protein, a lectin's structure will determine if it is harmful or beneficial to us. Venom (not a lectin, but still a protein), for example, is very bad for us. But the protein found in sweet potatoes can help our bodies fight cancer.[78],[79]

Some lectins made by plants are designed to help them fight microbes and insects, but just because it is bad for one species, doesn't mean it is bad for us. Avocados are toxic to birds and dogs but fine for us.

Still, lectins aren't much of an issue as most protein structures are denatured during the cooking process. For example, in China they eat the stingers of scorpions after dipping them in hot oil. The heat denatures the protein and the poison now becomes a source of amino acids. This is why the lectins of the red kidney bean are no longer toxic to us once we cook them.

And depending on their structure, lectins can be good for us. Several plant lectins have been shown to have anticancer properties when they are in our bodies.[80]

But before you go eat some raw beans (don't do that), new studies show that cooked beans appear to have a much stronger anti-cancer effect than raw or sprouted.[81]

And studies have shown beans do not give you gas. So don't use that as an excuse.

Finally and you're probably still wondering why I started to talk about beans after talking about weight loss, beans are very low on the glycemic index. Not only are they extremely low, but they seem to blunt the glycemic load of foods eaten within several hours.[82]

But don't go only by the glycemic index. Potatoes are one of the highest foods on the glycemic index. But when you eat whole foods, you get a lot of protective properties, like fiber and phytonutrients. And this is proven by the fact a man ate only 20 potatoes a day for 60 days and lost weight, lowered his cholesterol levels, and his blood sugar levels stayed the same. Again, great things start to happen when you start to eat whole foods, it's what your body wants. Plus, potatoes have all the essential amino acids and lots of minerals. So eat potatoes, I certainly do.

In general, the less animal products you consume and the more fiber you eat (like beans, potatoes, and vegetables), the thinner your waist will be. It's no coincidence that vegans tend to be a lot thinner, especially in the waist, than meat-eaters.[83],[84],[85]

Okay, so we are taking our B12 (maybe vitamin D) and eating our beans and potatoes.

Next, eat your fats with your salad. We are staying low-fat, but when you do, eat them with your greens. There are a lot of fat-soluble nutrients in raw vegetables you can't get unless you consume them with fat. But no oils or dressings. Remember, we are doing whole foods only. So basically eat your nuts with your salad.

It may sound impossible to enjoy a salad like that but it isn't. Today I had a salad with spinach, kale, flaxseeds, raisins, cranberries, walnuts, and sunflower seeds. It was great. Try it! (If you don't like the taste of flaxseed, I suggest you put it in your oatmeal as you won't taste it at all

like that. It's only a little bit of fat to your breakfast and the phytonutrients in them are worth it.)

And speaking of flaxseed (high in omega-3s), make sure you eat more omega-3 fats than omega-6 fats. But don't exclude certain nuts because of their high omega-6 profile. Variety is the key to being healthy.

With omega-3 fatty acids, there is some new science suggesting that ALA (the plant form of omega-3 found in flaxseed and chia seed) is adequately converted to DHA and EPA (the two other types of omega-3s) for vegans. However, this can't happen if you eat too many omega-6s. So it's only really an issue if you eat too many processed grains like bread, chips (they usually have saturated fat in them too), pastries (they often also contain eggs), and cereal or if you use too many cooking oils high in omega-6s. So you don't need an algae-based omega-3 supplement to get your DHA and EPA, but you can take it if you want.

When it comes to processed foods, I know you're probably going to buy some at the grocery store for variety and to have something tasty to eat. While we should be aiming for only whole foods, I can understand why you would do that. I do the same. However, many products, even those marketed as vegan and vegetarian, are loaded with saturated fat and sodium (sodium/salt will increase your blood pressure and that will weaken your arteries over time). I don't know if I made this point clear in the book but, except for what you find in nuts and coconuts (whole foods), you should be aiming for *zero* saturated fat in your diet as, like cholesterol, your body makes all that it needs. Even with whole foods, it's probably best to err on fewer fats than too many. With processed foods, all I can advise you to do is to get in the habit of reading nutrition labels and don't let yourself binge too much on the bad stuff. Nothing wrong with enjoying yourself once in a while (what's the point of living longer if you don't enjoy it?), as long as you are aware of what you're getting yourself into.

To recap on supplements, as a vegan always have B12 and vitamin D with you. Always take B12, but you only need vitamin D if you don't get enough sun that day (or if you live way up north or south from the equator where the sunrays are too weak for your body to use). And depending on

your personal needs, an algae-based omega-3 supplement and a vegan protein supplement. Finally, even if you are taking an algae-based omega-3 supplement, consume some flaxseeds each day for the omega-3s and phytonutrients.

For food, what I usually eat for the day is what I called the simple three: oats, greens, and beans. (It's a play off of Dr. Greger's advice/rhyme of eating your greens and beans as they are two of the healthiest foods on the planet. I think he would agree that berries are a close third and that's what you put on your oats.) That's your breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Of course, it isn't that simple as you need to add others foods to get all your nutrition (e.g., rice to your beans, nuts to your greens, and berries to your oats). Also, you can always swap out foods for variety (for example, potatoes, sweet potatoes, or whole wheat noodles instead of beans for dinner). And when I say greens I mean healthy greens like kale, spinach, and collard greens, not greens with low nutritional value like iceberg lettuce. You always want dark greens. They have more protein and antioxidants. Darker colors in plants usually mean more nutrition. Red onions, for example, have more antioxidants than white onions. So go for those rich, dark colors in plants.

Here are the simple three in more detail:

Breakfast: Oatmeal with frozen mixed berries and flaxseeds.

Lunch: Salad (mixed greens and kale) with walnuts, almonds, and sunflower seeds.

Dinner: Legumes (beans or lentils) and rice.

Nothing too complicated. I mostly consume beans, rice, and potatoes. They are my big meals of the day to make sure I get enough protein and minerals. And, frequently, I'll have other smaller meals or snacks like air-popped popcorn, microwave some frozen vegetables (corn, okra, green beans, broccoli, etc.) or vegetable soup, or an apple with almond butter.

If I buy canned beans (always look for low or no sodium), I can just use the microwave for all my cooking. For rice, I either get the microwaveable rice or I'll use a crock pot. But if you notice everything else is easily cooked in the microwave. You can even microwave potatoes. But if you



do that, rinse them so they are wet before you put them in or else you can start a fire.

(After doing a lot of research, it looks like microwaving is no worse than any other cooking method. It might even preserve the most nutrients.[86] Don't believe the random internet articles out there. It's not possible for microwave energy to stay on your food once the oven is off. Plus, it's non-ionizing radiation. That's the kind of radiation picked up by your AM/FM radios, cell phones, and produced by your WiFi router. And infrared non-ionizing radiation, what is produced by your microwave, is the same stuff produced by fire and sunlight. You aren't scared of a campfire or a beautiful, sunny day, are you? Keep in mind, people who get regular sunlight, for whatever reason (vitamin D, nitric oxide, dilated blood vessels, etc.), tend to have healthier hearts and lower cancer rates. (However, the sun can damage the skin and make it look older with wrinkles, age spots, and such (photoaging). So how much sun you want to get is up to you, but *never* let yourself get sunburned.) But even if you are still afraid, a little bit of the more dangerous *ionizing* radiation has been shown to be good for your health. Like a workout, your body adapts to the stress and becomes stronger. So non-ionizing radiation should be nothing to worry about.)

But do try to add variety as much as you can. For example, I try to include different spices (e.g., turmeric, oregano, and basil), mushrooms, onions, garlic (freshly crushed garlic has very strong anti-cancer properties), corn, broccoli, okra, etc. in my beans and potatoes. I'll use date sugar (crushed dates so technically a whole food) and pumpkin pie spice in my oatmeal and sweet potatoes. And my salad has all types of vegetables (beets, bell peppers, carrots, kale, arugula, watercress, etc.). You get the idea. It is all about variety to make sure you are eating healthy.

But that is just my way of doing it.

And when you start being a vegan, I would suggest you put what you eat into a food tracker for the first few weeks. This way you can get an idea what it takes to get your daily nutrient intake recommendations and you athletes can make sure you're getting enough calories, protein, and minerals for your activity level. As far as exercise goes, I'll just say being

active each day (walking, gardening, taking care of your yard, etc.) is way more important than working out. Exercise is great, but being active, instead of sitting in a chair for 8 hours a day, is way more important as an hour of exercise a day won't undo the damage of a sedentary lifestyle. Lately, I've been using Cron-o-Meter ([cronometer.com](http://cronometer.com)) as my food and activity tracker. (Just use the Recommended Daily Allowances (RDAs) in these food trackers as a general guide as they will probably change in the future as our understanding of nutrition improves. Besides, they're only recommendations for your *average* person.) While using Cron-o-Meter I realized I was a bit low on calcium and riboflavin. So I added a cup of soy milk to my diet.

Yes, soy milk is technically a processed food (soybeans or edamame would be healthier), but it's better than cow's milk. And don't worry about the phytoestrogens in soy milk unless you are drinking a gallon a day. Even for infants, consuming soy showed no effects on growth or reproductive health.[87] Soy even has isoflavones with antiestrogenic activity which might help to neutralize the phytoestrogens' hormonal effects.[88] There is a reason why soybeans have been used for millennia. Plus, phytoestrogens appear to be protective against several cancers.

For drinks in general, needless to say, stay away from the soda drinks and sugary beverages, even if they are plant-based. Your body needs the fiber to process the sugar properly. Sugar, when consumed *without* fiber, has a strong association with pancreatic cancer.[89] Steve Jobs, who was mostly a vegan, was known for drinking energy drinks, fruit drinks, and fruit smoothies all the time, and he died of pancreatic cancer (the type that comes from overactive insulin cells). (If you're now worried about your insulin levels and that type of pancreatic cancer, you should read what I have to say about saturated fat in the next chapter.) But if you do make your own fruit drinks, use a blender (so that the fiber is still in there), not a juice extractor. But even then the fiber is broken down making it less effective (we know this by the higher spike in insulin from blended foods compared to their whole food forms). Bottom line: your body prefers your fiber intact (i.e., don't turn your whole foods into processed foods by putting them in a food processor).

Teas are generally not just good but great for you. (They come from plants. What did you expect?).[90],[91],[92],[93],[94],[95] However, some of the more exotic ones have been found to be slightly toxic.[96] (Like I said, they come from plants and some plants are bad for you.) So if you stick to the popular ones you should be just fine (green tea, peppermint tea, hibiscus tea, etc.). What about coffee? The studies show that coffee is both good and bad for you. So, unless you need it to wake you up or you really like the taste, I don't see why you would consume it. Hot chocolate, on the other hand, is great for you as long as you don't have it with all that sugar in it.[97] Just keep in mind, heat damage can lead to cancer. So regardless of what you drink, try to avoid burning your mouth and throat.

(I know there are probably some avid coffee drinkers who want to know more about coffee so I decided to add this rather long paragraph to the book. We're still learning about coffee but this is the best information I could find. Again, do your own research when it comes to your diet. Coffee has been shown to decrease the rate of several cancers and to be protective against several neurological diseases (probably from the caffeine as it's an antioxidant).[98] It also protects you from liver fibrosis (scarring of the liver).[99] While most of the studies I see say it lowers blood pressure, some say it increases blood pressure, and some show no difference at all. And when it comes to blood clotting factors/deep vein thrombosis, I've seen studies, both observational and experimental, that suggested a decrease, but I've also seen studies, both observational and experimental that suggest an increase. While I wish I could find a definitive answer, it looks like we just need more studies. However, what we know for sure is that coffee has been shown to increase LDL and homocysteine levels.[100] That's why I said it's both good and bad for you. But this is caused by the diterpenoid alcohols/diterpenes, which can be greatly reduced by using a paper filter (i.e., pouring your coffee through a paper coffee filter).[101] Before you get too worried about LDL and your homocysteine levels, keep in mind, an experimental study showed just one cup of filtered coffee a day significantly protects LDL from being oxidized.[102] (Remember, it appears LDL must be oxidized before it turns into plaque.) And another study, though observational, showed changes in homocysteine levels were insignificant if you had 2

cups or less of *filtered* coffee unlike *unfiltered* coffee which showed a direct linear increase even at low levels.[103] And another study showed *no* change in homocysteine levels for up to 4 cups of paper filtered coffee.[104] While it may seem like a good thing to remove these diterpenoid alcohols, those same alcohols also appear to have antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and anticancer properties.[105] Coffee is a chemical soup and the type of bean, roast, and extraction method could all result in a different final product. (Perhaps this is why we get various results on blood pressure and blood clotting factors.) Thus, it's hard to say what chemicals are playing what role in your body. So there is some concern over coffee increasing cancer rates from some of the thousands of chemicals found in it. Acrylamide, created during the roasting process, is one such example. But we still don't know if acrylamide causes cancer in humans or not. And a review study looking at several meta-analysis studies and recent studies saw no correlation between coffee consumption and increased cancer risk except for what might be a slight association with bladder cancer for *heavy* coffee drinkers. Most of the studies reviewed defined heavy coffee drinkers as having more than 5 cups a day.[106] (However, I believe this is probably coming from the chlorine in the tap water, not the coffee itself, as most heavy coffee drinkers, I assume, are brewing their stuff at home. And I believe the reason that we *don't* see the same issue in other tissues exposed to coffee/tap water, like the colon, has to do with coffee having some very strong anticancer properties on those specific tissues.[107] I'll talk more about chlorine being in your tap water later.) The review study showed there might also be a weak link between heavy coffee drinking mothers and childhood leukemia. But keep in mind, the vast majority of the studies reviewed showed *no* link between maternal coffee consumption and childhood leukemia. Still, I think a good rule to follow is to not have pregnant women, breastfeeding women, or children drink coffee. But, overall, it clearly decreases cancer rates regardless of the acrylamide from the roasting process. But if you're thinking about getting a lighter roast to have less acrylamide, the dark roasts actually tend to have the lowest levels.[108] But, honestly, brewed coffee is very low in acrylamide unless you are drinking instant coffee, a coffee substitute, or some unusual brew that contains the coffee grounds themselves.[109] The coffee bean is actually green when found in nature. The roasting process

is what makes it that dark brown color. You can use the green coffee beans to make coffee, but you still need to cook the beans (most people boil them) to break down the bad chemicals naturally found in them (just like we do with red kidney beans). Finally, an umbrella study looking at over 200 meta-analysis studies, though the vast majority were observational, showed that coffee drinkers (with the optimal being about 3-4 cups a day) had a decrease in cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular death, cancer, and all-cause mortality.[110] However, the same study did say the only people who *shouldn't* drink coffee are pregnant woman as we see an increased rate of premature birth, low birth rate, and pregnancy loss. This might be a “correlation is not causation” issue (as a lot of coffee drinkers also smoke cigarettes), but I wouldn't risk it. You might be interested to know that this umbrella study saw no significant correlation between coffee consumption and venous thrombosis. It also saw a slight decrease in both types of blood pressure for coffee drinkers. Despite the study favoring 3-4 cups a day, given what we know about diterpenoid alcohols and other possible problems with coffee, I would play it safe and go for no more than two cups a day and let your other foods and teas play their role in keeping you healthy. So a cup or two of *filtered* coffee a day should be a healthy addition to your diet. If you want to brew your own coffee at home, you don't need a coffee maker. Just put your grounds and paper filter on a strainer over a coffee cup. Then pour hot water (I just heat it in the microwave) over it. it's about 2 tablespoons of coffee grounds per cup. But if you don't like coffee, other plant foods will give you some of the same benefits without you having to worry about the LDL increase or caffeine buzz.)

But you can always just stick to water. I prefer to put a little bit of vitamin C (ascorbic acid) in it to neutralize the destructive chlorine and its byproducts.[111] (Chlorine, an element and a disinfectant, required by the EPA to be in your tap water and found in some bottled waters, has a link to bladder and rectal cancer (the rectum is the last part of the colon).[112],[113] While chlorine isn't technically bleach (it's *in* bleach), it's the main reason bleach works. The chlorine interacts with your tissues to create trihalomethanes (THMs), which in turn create free radicals, genotoxic compounds, and/or cytotoxic compounds (compounds that damages the cell with or without direct DNA damage) in your body.[114]

So chlorine is sort of like heme iron.) Lemons, limes, oranges, crushed pomegranate seeds, hibiscus tea, or anything with vitamin C will neutralize it. However, the acids in fruits can put your teeth in a weakened state, so you shouldn't go overboard with the lemon nor brush your teeth right after drinking it. But you can always drink it through a plastic straw (or a glass straw if you want to avoid plastics). I know drinking through a straw is unnatural, but so is having chlorine in your water. (An activated carbon water filter will reduce total chlorine by about 50-70% per one older study I saw some time back. I haven't been able to find it again, but I believe the study was done in the 80s. So the filters today might do a better job. A reverse osmosis system does the best, but it removes pretty much all the minerals in water including ones that seem to be protective for your heart. Activated carbon will tend to leave these minerals in there. I'll talk more about the minerals in hard water in the next chapter.)

It seems like a few in the vegan community advocate fasting so I'll cover it here. The science shows, more or less, it can be both good and bad for you, like coffee. However, the bad parts seem to come in more and more the longer you do a fast like getting dizzy or passing out when standing. A few people have died from that (e.g., falling down the stairs). I've heard many vegans say, while they felt like they got some health benefits from it, they also felt like they did permanent damage to their bodies with a long water fast. I don't know if you can really design a study to prove this or not. But keep in mind, the vitamins and minerals in your body will decrease more and more, especially the water-soluble ones, the longer you do the fast. And not having enough vitamins and minerals in your body will definitely damage it. And you could die from an electrolyte imbalance (your heart can't pump blood) if you have kidney disease. So I would never recommend something like a 30-day water fast. It just seems too risky, especially if you are in bad health. That being said, the vast majority of people do water fasting without any problems (besides headaches and such). As to the benefits, some studies suggest a boost in brain power/new brain cells, a maintenance mode (cells cleaning and repairing themselves) being activated by the body, and weight loss (especially when it comes to fat). But exercise will give you a lot of the same benefits. Perhaps not in the same quantities (it probably gives more brain boosting power and less weight loss than fasting), but when

combined with a healthy diet it'll pretty much give you what you want. But if you do want to fast, at most I would recommend a morning fast (eating your first meal late in the day), a one to two day fast once a week (interestingly, hospitals often treat pancreatitis by having you essentially do a water fast for a few days to give the pancreas a break), or an every other day fast. And, still, get approval from your doctor first. If you do fast, keep in mind LDL (including small particle LDL) will increase and your blood will thicken as it starts to release fat to be used as energy.[115] This will make you more susceptible to sudden heart diseases and blood clots during this time. (So only healthy people should do a fast. Overweight people and those with heart conditions are better just eating fewer calories at each meal and plant foods have a very low amount of calories per volume.) But if you still plan on doing a fast, I would suggest you drink a lot of water (especially lemon water as it'll help with the LDL) and get plenty of movement to keep your arteries healthy.

But seeing that fasting is both good and bad for you, the only reason I could see anyone doing it is to accelerate/help the weight loss process as having a simple rule to follow is an easy way to restrict your calories. Personally, I don't think anyone should bother doing any type of fasting. While they don't admit it, most people do fasting to lose some vanity pounds. But chances are you gained weight because of a diet based around saturated fat and animal products (like I said, I'll talk more about insulin sensitivity and saturated fat in the new chapter after this one). And when you start eating only whole foods, you should see the weight come off gradually (as studies have found over and over again). Like I said before, vegans on average tend to be slimmer and weigh less than people who eat meat. Eat your fruits and vegetables! But, if you're healthy, you shouldn't feel too bad about eating a late breakfast or skipping it once in a while.

Finally, you can make yourself into an experimental study. Go to your doctor and have them check your cholesterol levels, C-reactive protein levels (inflammation markers), and blood pressure. (There are a lot of things you can get tested for but starting with the number one killer in the world might be a good idea.) Then go on a low-sodium, whole-food, plant-based diet (with some B12, of course) while keeping everything else the

same. (But if you smoke, drink, or live a sedentary life, forget about doing an experimental study and stop abusing your body.) Then see where your levels are at in a month. And then you'll have proof that a diet based on plant food is best for your body.

Again, do your own research and find out what works for you.

That's it.

I hope this is a solid foundation for your new journey to a healthy lifestyle.

Take care and never stop learning!



# And, No, Salt Is Not Good for You

While this book was supposed to be only about animal products, I ended up going back and adding this chapter here as just how the animal product industries appear to be putting their spin on the science the salt industry also seems to be playing that same game. So I wrote this chapter (which could probably be its own book).

I should warn you, unlike the first half of this book which is pretty clear, concise, and easy to read, the analysis gets pretty deep here. For animal products, not only do we not need to eat them but the less we eat the healthier we tend to be. With sodium, however, while too much is bad for you, it is a necessary nutrient. And figuring out how much we need takes some good analysis of the studies and a bit of math. But, trust me, there is an answer backed by the science.

Before we get into the spin from the salt industry, let's first understand what salt is and how it affects our bodies, and then we'll look at the long-standing science saying salt is mostly, if not entirely, bad for you.

## What Is Salt?

The first thing you have to understand is salt and sodium aren't the same thing. Salt *contains* sodium in the form of sodium chloride. So to better understand salt, let's back up and understand the element sodium.

The sodium atom is usually a positively charged one (a positive ion because it has one more proton than its total number of electrons). So this atom attracts negatively charged atoms and molecules (and water molecules as they are negatively charged on one side). Thus, when you have more sodium in your blood, it attracts more water into your arteries, and that increases your blood pressure. But when sodium is already combined with a negatively charged ion(s), it's neutral (like sodium bicarbonate or what we know as baking soda) as the ions balance each other out and, thus, those compounds can't affect our blood pressure.

However, with the compound sodium chloride (table salt) your body breaks the bond to get to the chloride ion so it can be used for various systems.

But you can get plenty of chloride already from plant foods. And too much chloride (like the amount found in processed meats, cheeses, and table salt) will increase your blood pressure just like sodium does (it is a *negatively* charged ion which also attracts water as water molecules are positively charged on its other side).

And when people argue about sodium or sodium chloride being worse, it seems very much like the red meat versus processed red meat argument. Too much sodium by itself is bad for you, but too much salt (sodium chloride) is probably worse as the chloride can also add to your blood pressure.

But back to sodium.

With sodium having a strong positive charge, it is rarely found in nature without already being combined to another molecule (except for animal blood where it is suspended in water and other electrolytes and, not to get too technical here, small amounts are around our cells for various cellular processes but about 85% of your sodium ions are in your circulatory system).

That means, for the most part, you'll only have problems with sodium if you take it in the form of table salt or sodium ions suspended in a solution, like water or blood.

(If you're wondering about animal flesh itself, I was surprised. *Pure* meat is pretty low in sodium. Not as low as plant foods, but at 50 milligrams a serving you would need to eat about 6 pounds of beef to go over most sodium recommendations. But when you consider all that saturated fat, don't even think about it. Plus, almost all meats are seasoned with salt. And cheese and processed meats are often made with some insane amounts. Just stay away from animal products.)

So increasing the sodium ions in your body to unnatural levels usually means either eating sodium chloride (table salt) or processed foods

containing table salt, drinking animal blood (why?) or eating processed/salted animal foods (a lot of animal foods you think aren't processed are still injected with a salt brine), and drinking soft water.

What is soft water, you might ask? Soft water systems found in homes replace suspended hard minerals (like calcium and magnesium ions) in tap water with softer minerals (usually sodium or potassium ions). The idea is that soft water works with soap better and you won't have calcium build up in your pipes and other places. While the sodium in it is in small amounts, we'll see later that even small changes in sodium can affect blood pressure. So it's no surprise when we compare people who drink soft water to those who drink hard water (regular tap water), those who drink soft water tend to have more heart disease. The evidence is there, but it's weak, probably due to the small amount of sodium in soft water (about 100-250 mg (milligrams) is consumed in a day, which is just enough to start to make a difference, but it's over 500 mg if you're drinking a gallon a day). Still, why drink something that might harm you? But if you do use a soft water system at home, potassium salts are healthier for your heart. I'll talk about the benefits of potassium later. However, considering how expensive potassium salts can be and how some of the health benefits of hard water might be coming from the minerals in it (especially the calcium and magnesium), you're probably best sticking to regular old tap water and getting your potassium from your foods.[116],[117],[118],[119]

Just think about it. We went for most of humankind without any salt. (And when you consider meat is naturally low in sodium, I find it odd how some in the Paleo movement seem to be pro salt.) It wasn't until we discovered that salt could preserve foods did we start adding large amounts of it to our diets. So why would people think salt would be good for us? It isn't found out in the wild. That increase in blood pressure just isn't natural for our bodies.

## **The Evidence**

### **Blood Pressure**

Now that we understand the molecular science going on, let's look at some studies to back this up. First, the observational studies.

A study looking at the blood pressure of thousands of children each year for about 15 years showed the strongest link had to do with sodium consumption.[120]

In an EPIC study looking at 23,000+ adults, it showed that more sodium consumed meant more blood pressure.[121]

Finally, the INTERSALT study, a worldwide epidemiological study (studies that look specifically at a disease and typically have experts in that field working on them), done with 10,000+ people in 32 countries showed increasing sodium intake increased both systolic blood pressure (pressure when your heart beats) and diastolic blood pressure (pressure while your heart is resting).[122]

Furthermore, the study was done in the 80s but another study re-evaluated it in the 90s and said the findings were still true today. One of the authors of the new study later went on to say that the findings are consistent with all known studies at the time (1997) including clinical observations, therapeutic interventions (experimental studies), randomized controlled trials (experimental studies), animal experiments, physiological investigations, evolutionary biology research, anthropological research, and epidemiological studies. We'll be looking at our own experimental studies soon.

So clearly, high dietary sodium intake is a risk factor for high blood pressure.

But let's take it further like we did with the Masai and the Bantu for saturated fat.

Let's look at a tribe that doesn't take table salt (as they've had very little contact with the modern world), the Yanomami Indians of the Brazilian rainforest. They have the *same* blood pressure from birth to death (which sounds pretty normal to me), unlike people in civilized society who have a systematic increase as they age (which sounds pretty abnormal to me). Some will argue that you need certain levels of salt/sodium for health

reasons (like allowing our nerves to carry electrical signals and having enough blood pressure for our hearts to pump blood). But sodium is naturally present in our foods and, apparently, these tribes, who don't even know what salt is, get enough to live into old age. (Like our caveman ancestors, their lifespans are shorter than ours as they don't have access to modern health technology and they're living in a very dangerous place, the Amazon rainforest. But even those who are very old for a Yanomami, around 60, have the same blood pressure levels since birth.)[123]

As for the extreme societies that eat salt to compare them against just look at us. How much stroke and hypertension (high blood pressure) do we have?

Now for the experimental studies. They also show that more salt equals higher blood pressure.

All animals tested on have been shown to suffer from higher blood pressure when more salt is added to their diet.[124],[125]

Why am I mentioning animal studies instead of human ones? Because *every* animal tested, even our closest relatives, had their blood pressure increase when sodium was increased. The more salt *any* animal gets, we are animals after all, the higher the blood pressure. Don't you think there's a reason why animal flesh is low in sodium and comparable to that of plants? And the few animals who evolved eating a high sodium diet developed special mechanisms to get rid of it like the marine iguanas in the Galapagos islands who swim in the ocean for food. They have cranial glands to filter the sodium out of their blood which is then shot out their noses. Before you argue our ability to sweat, you would have to sweat *heavily* for more than an hour before you lose a good amount of sodium when you consider how much we get in our Western diet (since we lose sodium through sweat that is probably why we crave it so much in the first place). And most Americans don't sweat each day. When was the last time you had a good sweat? (For all you athletes that do, I'll be talking in-depth about this later.)

And the human experimental studies? The same thing, the more salt they eat, the higher the blood pressure.

It was true for healthy, elderly subjects without hypertension.[126]

And patients of various ages already with hypertension were able to treat it without drugs by lowering their salt intake.[127]

And an experimental study with almost 500 participants reducing salt *alone* reduced blood pressure regardless of hypertension or not, race, and gender (but the people who also ate more fruits and vegetables did even better, though salt reduction had the greatest effect). The interesting part was it happened in a "stepwise fashion." In other words, even a little bit of salt out of your diet meant a little bit of lower blood pressure. And it did so significantly. "[R]eduction of sodium intake significantly lowered systolic and diastolic blood pressure[.]"[128]

So we keep talking about salt and sodium increasing our blood pressure. But is that really bad for us?

If you don't understand why high blood pressure is bad, think of pipes with pressurized water in them. With enough pressure, the pipes will burst (or at least weaken over time).

And that's why you get things like hemorrhagic strokes (strokes from ruptured vessels), transient ischemic attack (strokes from blood clots, I'll talk more on how high blood pressure can create blood clots later), heart deformities, and it might even play a role in varicose veins (those veiny lumps you often see in the legs of older people). Yes, the heart and arteries can heal themselves, but they need time to do that (that's why athletes with a low resting heart rate often have such healthy hearts, they have more time to heal between each beat). And that high blood pressure is probably actively damaging your arteries or forcing them to heal in a deformed manner. And once there is a deformity in your circulatory system, it's very unlikely for it to go back to normal. Sodium damages your heart.

## **Mortality**

But to prove that, instead of just looking at studies linking salt/sodium consumption and blood pressure, let's look at studies showing salt/sodium consumption being connected to mortality.

Again, let's look at the observational studies first.

A 12-year prospective follow-up cohort study was done with more than 4,000 randomly selected men and women and took 24-hour urinary sodium excretion from them (the gold standard in measuring sodium levels). It showed that 13.7 daily grams of salt consumption (5.5 grams of sodium) double the chances of heart failure compared to those who consumed only 6.8 grams (2.7 grams of sodium).[129]

Finland started a national campaign since the mid-1970s to decrease sodium consumption and increase potassium, calcium, and magnesium consumption. As a nation, not only did blood pressure drop, but there was an 80% decrease in both stroke and coronary heart disease mortality.[130]

There was a meta-analysis study of sodium in regards to stroke and total cardiovascular disease following 177,025 people for 3.5 to 19 years that showed high salt intake as significantly increasing the risk of stroke and total cardiovascular disease.[131]

And, finally, a prospective cohort study of a nationally representative sample of 12,267 U.S. adults tracked over 15 years showed that those with the most sodium meant a 20% increase in all causes of death during that period. (Compared to the average American, who is already "sick" with too much salt and death. Meaning that'll be a much higher percentage compared to the Yanomami Indians). And those with the lowest sodium and highest potassium consumption (potassium has heart benefits, which, again, I'll talk about later) decreased their chance of death by cardiovascular disease by 45% and death by ischemic heart disease (another name for coronary heart disease and coronary artery disease) by a whopping 215%.[132]

You're probably wondering how sodium is playing such a strong role in death by coronary heart disease since coronary heart disease is only caused by plaque. While only atherosclerosis plaque causes it, heart

attacks (lack of blood to the heart, also known as myocardial infarction) often come when that plaque is ruptured and then a blood clot forms in the coronary arteries which can then block blood from going to the heart. (Or if a clot develops somewhere else, it can travel to your lungs and kill you.) That pressure from sodium probably makes it more likely for that plaque to rupture. This logic would explain why most heart attacks happen during exercise (like during a game of basketball) or on Monday when people are stressed about work as each activity temporarily increases your blood pressure. (Of course, regular exercise should *decrease* your average blood pressure over time.)

And it would explain this high percentage number coming from sodium consumption as death from heart attack is labeled as death from coronary *heart* disease, which is also called death from coronary *artery* disease (CAD). (To be clear, ischemic heart disease, coronary heart disease, and coronary artery disease are all the same thing. Basically, they all refer to plaque restricting blood flow in the arteries of the heart. Don't know why we have so many names for the same thing.) And, again, we would expect groups like the Yanomami Indians to have an even bigger percentage difference if any deaths at all.

We'll talk about some experimental studies in regards to mortality later, but for now let's look at some counterarguments and what appears to be spin from the salt industry.

## The Counterarguments

So here are some popular counterarguments given by people who advocate a higher sodium intake or staying at the same (high) amount for the Western world.

*Sodium is needed for proper infant development.*[133]

That study was looking at other studies that looked at baby rats. And they gave them an *unnaturally* sodium deficient diet. Like I said, sodium is naturally present in whole foods so deficiency isn't an issue for those who eat their fruits and vegetables. And the children of the Yanomami Indians



(who add no salt to their diet) develop just fine. Sodium is an essential mineral for the human body, but we get plenty of it from plants.

*But salt is needed for your brain. The kainate receptor is fundamental for normal brain function. And it needs salt to work.[134]*

Looking at that study, they tested that brain receptor in solutions with and without Na<sup>+</sup> and Cl<sup>-</sup> present (after a computer simulation prediction). So they tested sodium and chlorine ions, not table salt (chloride is a negatively charged chlorine atom and because of that charge it doesn't have the same disinfectant properties). (Interestingly, it doesn't look like they tested sodium ions or chlorine ions alone, only together.) But like I said, sodium and chlorine ions are already present in our blood and last time I checked blood still goes to your brain (though I wonder about the people who advocate a high-sodium diet).

We have about 16,200 milligrams and 18,000 milligrams of sodium and chloride, respectively, already in our blood. And we have even more floating around our cells, including our brain cells.

(We actually have more sodium ions than chlorine ions in our blood. Grams is a measurement of mass and the sodium atom is 35% lighter than the chloride atom. So we have about 40% more sodium atoms in our blood than chloride atoms.  $18,000 \times (1 - 0.35) \times 1.4 \approx 16,200$  with roughly a 1% difference from rounding the percentages.)

And your body tries to keep your sodium and chloride at a certain level, so if you eat more salt, it doesn't necessarily mean you'll have more kainate receptor activity. And that's probably a good thing.

If you ever study brain science, needless to say, it's complicated. You can't really say a receptor is good or bad. And it's hard to say how necessary one receptor is.

But it's interesting to see that kainate receptors might be linked to drug addiction. While our understanding of the kainate receptor is still new, it seems to play a role in synaptic plasticity (changes in the brain). And it seems like the more receptors you have the more sensitive the brain might be to drugs like alcohol and cocaine.[135]

Thus, it wouldn't be surprising that the more you have, the more likely your brain will change in response to mind-altering drugs. And maybe it's not the number of receptors you have, but the number activated. So if you have a high salt diet, it might activate more receptors, and then you might be more susceptible to becoming an addict. But if you're on a low or no salt diet, maybe you're less likely to become addicted to things. But that's just speculation. The point is, you can't say kainate receptors are fundamental to the brain and, thus, we need to eat more table salt. That's a silly argument. And we have plenty of sodium and chloride in our bodies already.

*Well, this study says you are smarter with more sodium.[136]*

And this study says you are smarter with *less* sodium, especially in the long-term.[137]

The difference between our two studies (both observational) is that mine is a cohort study, while yours is a cross-sectional study. While we've already talked about the limitations of cross-sectional studies before, one thing I didn't mention is that it's a snapshot in time. A cohort study, however, follows people and their habits (this one did it for three years). That means we can not only see the long-term results but it's also more experimental in nature (it gets more to the cause and effect).

So if you want to be smarter, you're probably better off *reducing* the sodium in your diet.

*But going from a high salt/sodium diet to a low one can hurt insulin sensitivity and elevate angiotensin and renin levels.*

Keep in mind those last hormones you talked about are the ones that regulate blood pressure. So, of course, they are going to change when you remove foods/ingredients that affect your blood pressure as your body is trying to keep everything in balance. You need those hormones to elevate to keep your blood pressure at a certain level, or else your heart won't be able to pump any blood. You would die!

So the more sodium you drop, the more it'll elevate those levels to keep you in balance. And that's why large increases of those hormones are typically only found in extreme adjustment cases.

But even then, those levels are naturally found in the Yanomami Indians we talked about who don't eat salt and their blood pressure stays the same for their entire lives. So those hormones shouldn't be considered elevated. They're probably pretty normal. We just have a society "sick" with salt.[138]

In regard to insulin, this study showed your insulin levels go back to normal (and it emphasizes the fact that it only happens in acute cases and, even then, the effect quickly disappears).[139]

(I should have covered this already in the book, but a lot of insulin problems come from too much saturated fat in your cells. It blocks the intracellular mechanism that responds to insulin, so your body (your pancreas) keeps pumping out more insulin trying to get a response. Yes, sugar will spike your insulin levels, but only fat can block the message and thus hurt your insulin sensitivity. And once you spike the fat in your blood through diet, your intramyocellular lipids levels (fat inside the cells) start to increase as well as insulin resistance. Just another reason to avoid animal products. Plant fats in the studies, however, like polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat, either improved insulin sensitivity or didn't affect it at all. But, all fats are extremely calorically dense. Don't be adding pure oil, even plant oil, to your vegetables. Remember, no extracts. We're on a *whole* foods diet. And that's probably why the guy who ate almost nothing but potatoes (so very little to no fat) lost so much weight. Potatoes are full of starch (sugar) but his blood sugar levels stayed the same because your body knows how to process it when it comes from a whole food.[140],[141],[142],[143])

*But there are several studies showing less sodium, at the levels you suggest, equals higher blood pressure and more heart disease like this one.*[144]

That was a study done in Korea and it admits that the lack of potassium was the cause of heart disease in the study. And if you look at the

numbers, the group showing the lowest heart disease (the highest sodium consuming group) was the only one barely getting close to the *minimum* recommendation of 4,700 mg of potassium per day. And each group that reduced sodium was also reducing their potassium as well. Not only does potassium play several roles in heart health, if you don't get enough potassium your body holds onto sodium. So even if you're consuming a low sodium diet but not getting enough potassium, that sodium will be kept in your blood, add to your blood pressure, and, ultimately, destroy your cardiovascular health.

These observational studies tend to come from Asia, especially Korea, as most of them get their vegetables (their potassium) from high sodium sources like seaweed (most are high in sodium), consuming them with soy sauce (very high in sodium), stews and soups that are highly salted, or vegetables that are pickled like kimchi (pickled foods are very high in sodium). It's another case of abnormal observational studies being preached as gospel without looking at the experimental studies just like we saw with animal products.

(Let me break here and talk about seaweed as we'll be discussing it a lot for another topic. Nori sheets, what is used to make sushi rolls, have almost no sodium in them whatsoever. Other seaweeds naturally have about 150 mg per serving (10 grams). And those packages at the grocery store have about two servings. However, in the United States, it looks like most of those roasted seaweed snacks are made from nori so they are low sodium. However, most of those packages of seaweeds often have salt added to them. All I can advise you to do is to take time to read their nutrition labels for their sodium content and when you eat sushi rolls just be careful with the soy sauce.)

We even have a Korean study showing the potassium in foods like kimchi (pickled vegetables) tends to have a protective effect from the high sodium content.[145] But even then the study still found that those who ate *more* kimchi were *more* likely to have higher blood pressure. So it really wasn't that protective after all, and I can't recommend it as a health food.

And this is backed up by another Korean study showing that the young Korean men in their 20s are suffering more and more from hypertension as their diet is shifting away from Korean foods to more processed and Western foods that have sodium but little to no potassium.[146]

And don't forget about the prospective cohort study we talked about that looked at groups of various levels of potassium and sodium intake. It was the group with the *highest* potassium and *lowest* sodium that did the best when it came to death from cardiovascular disease (CVD).

So the potassium helps, but it still can't *negate* a high-sodium diet.

*Well, I found this study of 101,945 people from five different continents (not just Asia) showing more salt consumption meant less mortality (including heart disease).[147]*

Okay, let's look at that study. It was an observational study (as it always seems to be the case) that followed 101,945 people in 17 countries. The data suggested it is best to get between 3 to 6 grams of sodium (7.5 to 15 grams of salt), which is well above the *maximum* of 1.5 grams or 2.4 grams of sodium recommended by many health associations.

They based this off what they called a J-shaped curve in the data set. To understand what they are talking about let's understand the more common U-shaped curve. If you plotted a graph showing nutrient consumption and mortality (the y-axis/vertical line having more mortality as you go up it and the x-axis/horizontal line being more of the nutrient you consume as you go to the right), you usually expect a U-shaped curve. In other words, at deficient levels you expect a population's mortality to increase and at toxic levels you also expect mortality levels to increase. But at recommended levels, you expect to have the least amount of deaths. So you should end up with a U-shaped curve when plotting the data set. In this study, however, they found a J-shaped curve (really a backward J) in regard to sodium. In other words, you saw high mortality for people consuming the least sodium and barely any mortality for those getting too much.

Based off all the other observational studies, experimental studies, and how we understand the molecular science, we would expect to see the

*exact* opposite. That is, fewer deaths with lower sodium consumption (except for unnatural levels at or near zero milligrams) and more mortality the more salt consumed (a J-shaped curve but in the other/normal direction). Something isn't right here.

That study was one of three observational studies regarding sodium consumption published by The New England Journal of Medicine on August 14, 2014.[148],[149]

Let's first see what the other observational studies had to say before we get into yours.

The first study used pretty much the same data set as the one you mentioned (102,216 adults from 18 different countries) and it showed that people getting less than 3 grams of sodium a day had the lowest blood pressure (both diastolic and systolic). And for every country, there was a trend that the more sodium you added the higher the blood pressure. And the less sodium you consumed, the lower the blood pressure. (There was a small uptick in blood pressure for the Chinese population in the lowest sodium consumption group of under 3 grams, but, overall, they followed the same trend. Remember this fact for later.)

The second study looked at 66 countries using mostly urine collections as a way to measure sodium intake (just like your study did) and it determined that 1.65 million cardiovascular deaths a year were attributed to having more than 2 grams of sodium a day.

These large observational studies seem to be in direct contradiction to yours.

So what's the big takeaway here? They're observational studies, so we don't expect them to agree with each other all the time. And so we don't base our health decisions off of them. That's why we rely on experimental studies.

But let's see if we can explain away those findings in your observational study anyway.

So let's look at that third study, your study. If you look closer at the data, they break it up into five sections by sodium consumption with the lowest being the less than 3 grams of sodium a day group. That is where the J-curve starts to take off into mortality. To me, they should have broken that part of the data down into smaller groups as it contains the anomaly. But we'll work with what we've got. Looking at all the other numbers, they generally had the worst of them all. They had the highest cholesterol levels, the highest percentage of cardiovascular disease, the most calories, highest use of alcohol, and the highest use of medication, especially in regard to treating heart disease. (And these bad numbers decreased, especially regarding cholesterol and medication for heart problems, with the higher sodium consuming groups.) So one explanation that pops into my head right away is the "sick" population argument. They are already sick with atherosclerosis plaque (which can take years to treat) and they are dying before they can get better. Keep in mind that with the J-shaped curve, they were looking at *all* major cardiovascular events and cardiovascular deaths (as well as *all*-cause mortality which also had the same J-shaped curve). And, as we've discussed in this book time and time again, coronary heart disease is our number one cause of death, which is *only* caused by atherosclerosis plaque (and, no, you do not need a blood clot to block a coronary artery, it can be entirely from plaque, but high blood pressure isn't the only cause of blood clots either), and our second most common killer is stroke, which 85% of is also caused by atherosclerosis plaque. While high blood pressure certainly doesn't help, the main cause of all of this is plaque which is what this population appears to be "sick" with. (And this would also explain why the higher sodium groups seemed to die less, because, looking at the numbers, they clearly had less atherosclerosis plaque to kill them.)

Furthermore, looking at the data, the largest groups come from China (they make up about half the study). Their top killers are also coronary heart disease and stroke (but stroke comes first for China.) And China has been in the news lately about having a sharp increase in heart disease since the late 1970s. Why? Because that is when the Western diet came in. There was a shift from plant foods to animal products and processed foods. (Remember, heart disease used to be virtually nonexistent in China.) So many of these Chinese doctors started/are

recommending to their patients with heart disease (as they are also following the Western world's protocol of treating it) to change to a low-salt diet, but often don't also recommend (as they should) to stop eating animal products and processed foods. So these high-risk patients end up lowering their salt consumption significantly (as they don't want to die) but still eat red meat, processed foods, saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol, which keeps adding to the plaque in their arteries and they eventually end up dying of a heart attack. And that would easily explain this bizarre J-shaped curve in the data set.

Again, this is an observational study. Thus, they can get to only *potential* factors, not cause and effect. While they admit to this limitation of observational studies, they claim that their "array-approach analysis" (which is supposed to account for things like high cholesterol) makes it unlikely for their findings to be false. However, it's just a mathematical model they apply to the data set which is done for *all* observational studies. It was just a multivariate adjustment. Think about it, if everyone in your low-sodium group is sick with atherosclerosis plaque and they keep adding to it by eating animal products, it's only a matter of time before they die of heart disease. So it doesn't matter how much you adjust the numbers for that, it's going to look like a low-sodium diet equals heart disease. As I keep saying, you can only get to *potential* factors with these kinds of studies.

Another possible explanation has to do with, again, the potassium. Looking at the numbers, the group with the lowest sodium consumption had the lowest potassium consumption as well. And you need potassium to regulate and relax your heart muscles. But, as I've already said, you also need potassium to excrete (pee out) excess sodium. Your study looked at urine measures of sodium. (The theory goes that the sodium in your body is more or less at your desired amount and your body will get rid of what you consume. Thus, what is in your pee in a 24-hour period is a good indication of how much sodium you normally get in a day.) But if you aren't getting enough potassium, you aren't going to pee out that sodium, your body is going to retain it. And since that same group claimed to be eating the most fruits and vegetables (and since fruits and vegetables have on average more potassium than animal products), it



might be an indication of kidney failure in this group. (As I will talk about later, saturated fat is one of the main causes of kidney failure. Stop eating animal products.) And studies have shown urine samples to be inaccurate with those who have kidney disease.[150]

(For those who want to investigate this further, I'll give you some more info. That study did not use actual 24-hour urine collections to determine the daily sodium and potassium intake of the participants. Instead, they applied what is called the Kawasaki formula to a morning fasting urine sample to project a 24-hour number. Which is fine as this method has been shown to be accurate. However, as the study I cited demonstrates, this isn't the case with those suffering from chronic kidney disease.)

Plus, in China, like Korean, a lot of their vegetables (their sources of potassium) have a lot of sodium in them (like stir-fried vegetables and different vegetable soups). So when the doctor says to stop eating sodium (or even oil/fat because a lot of their vegetable dishes have a lot of oil in them), they might lose what little potassium (and other health benefits from those vegetables) they were getting in their diets.

Now think back to the other observational study I mentioned that used pretty much the same data set as yours with that slight uptick in blood pressure for the Chinese low-sodium group. Unnatural sodium retention, kidney disease, suddenly treating their high blood pressure with a low sodium diet, not getting enough potassium, and/or bad urine sample measurements could explain this and it would be consistent with the explanations I've been giving for the unusual findings in your observational study. It all matches up.

And I believe those are pretty reasonable explanations as to why we have this *one* large-scale observational study that is so different compared to all the other large-scale observational studies out there.

But, again, we don't really care about the *observational* studies. All we really care about are the *experimental* studies. And those done on all animals and humans consistently show sodium and salt to increase your blood pressure. Our understanding of the molecular science also backs this up.

But do we have experimental studies showing a link between sodium consumption and cardiovascular death? Actually, yes, we do.

## **Mortality - Experimental Studies**

So in experimental studies, we have to control the groups and the variables. While this is easy for linking sodium intake and blood pressure as the change is pretty quick, showing a link between sodium consumption and death is harder as that's something that happens over a lifetime.

Then how are these experimental studies done?

Most of them involve the elderly in retirement homes since we can easily control their sodium intake and access to salt before they die. A little morbid, I know. This one had the elderly people in retirements homes replace their table salt with a potassium salt (potassium chloride). The results? A reduction in cardiovascular death and a longer life (and they even saved on medical costs).[151] Like I said, if you're going to use a soft water system at home, use those potassium salts. And if you really love putting table salt on your food, you can use potassium chloride instead.

And there are other interventional studies with younger adults (though these experimental studies can't be as tightly controlled as the ones used in retirement homes so they're a little more observational in nature). They also show the same link.

This one (thousands of 30- to 50-year-olds, followed for 15 years) didn't even bother having them increase their potassium. They only targeted sodium reduction (one of their groups also added in weight-loss). And they found the same results: more sodium means more cardiovascular death and more cardiovascular disease. By reducing sodium intake by 25%-35%, there was a 38% decrease in CVD mortality. Also, unlike your study, they made sure these people were free of cardiovascular disease and hypertension before starting it. And, unlike your study, it used actual 24-hour urine collections for sodium intake.[152]

Another follow-up study was done with the same group 5 years later (so 20 years in total) using the same 24-hour urine collection method this time looking at all-cause mortality. They saw a "direct linear association between average sodium intake and mortality." So a straight line instead of a J-shaped curve. The lowest total mortality group was those with *less than* 1 gram of daily sodium intake (way less than the 3 grams to 6 grams suggested by your study) and there was a steady increase in deaths as you consumed more sodium per day (about 12% increase in total mortality for every gram (1,000 milligrams) increase of sodium).[153]

And that's not to mention all the observational studies we've already talked about linking sodium consumption and death (which included prospective cohort studies and a countrywide study done over 30 years).

I think the science is pretty overwhelming at this point. Salt will kill you!

And just common sense would tell you high blood pressure is bad for us. Pipes under pressure will start to leak, deform, or even burst. You don't want that for your heart.

## **What Should You Do About Salt?**

So *all* the studies out there show a link between sodium consumption, high blood pressure, and heart disease with very few exceptions. But those exceptions are observational studies which we can give explanations for.

Either the groups they studied weren't getting enough potassium, which will cause you to retain sodium, regardless of levels consumed, and you'll then suffer from more hypertension and heart disease; or they are trying to link sodium consumption to heart diseases that *only* atherosclerosis plaque can cause. I think it's a pretty clear case of another industry trying to use misleading observational studies to confuse the public.

And the experimental studies consistently showed the link between sodium consumption, blood pressure, and mortality.

There is no debate. Salt is bad for you.

But what should you do about salt in our modern society? How much should you worry about it?

Remember the Bantu people in Africa who eat mostly fruits and vegetables? Hypertension (high blood pressure) is uncommon with them. But that means the Bantu people do have *some* hypertension (1 in 10 adults) unlike the Yanomami Indians in Brazil who have *no* hypertension. This is probably because the Bantu have been exposed to the Western diet and processed/salty foods to a degree while the Yanomami have little to no contact with the modern world.[154]

That means a vegan diet is good, but a vegan diet without salt is even better for you.

But I know you probably don't want to spend your life counting your milligrams of sodium. Then I would suggest you eat more potassium (like I said, it makes your body pee out excess sodium and it relaxes your arteries). And where do you find great sources of potassium? You guessed it, plant foods. Just another reason to eat your fruits and vegetables.

Just think back to the observational study showing a decrease in sodium *or* increase in potassium decreased deaths in a population. But the group with the lowest sodium consumption *and* highest potassium consumption had the best heart health. But even that study might suffer from the "sick" population problem (keep in mind, 1 out of 3 adults over 18 have hypertension, and 1 out of 2 senior citizens have hypertension), as the lower sodium groups were probably nowhere close to the Yanomami Indian levels.

*Again*, I know you don't want to stress about counting your milligrams of sodium. But, I think it's still possible to add low amounts of salt to our diet without *any* risk of hypertension. Let's look at another indigenous tribe who naturally consumes sodium.

The Kitava from Papua New Guinea cook their food in seawater (so they get salt, specifically sodium chloride, what's in our salt shakers, in their diet but much less than the average American). However, they also eat a ton of potassium-rich foods (they get about three times what the average

American does). Yet, unlike the Bantu, they have *no* signs of high blood pressure. And, like the Yanomami Indians, their blood pressure stays pretty much the same their whole lives (I'll talk more about it for those interested). And keep in mind, they don't eat a perfect vegan diet. Some smoke tobacco and they all eat some saturated fats (like the occasional coconut and fish, but they eat mostly yams and sweet potatoes). So eat fruits and vegetables that are high in potassium! The more the better.[155]

(For those who want to know more about their blood pressure, their diastolic (resting blood pressure) stayed the same for their entire lives. Their systolic (beating blood pressure) had a small uptick but only in their 60s and only by 10 mmHg which still left them in what our society considers the normal range. But that's a small price to pay considering you get the luxury of eating some salt in your diet and it'll probably never cause you to die of cardiovascular disease. Heck, most Yanomami Indians don't even live to 60.)[156]

(And for those who want to know more about their saturated fat consumption, they eat fish about 2-4 times a week. Given that they do have "partly unfavourable serum lipoprotein [cholesterol] levels" and that fish is pretty low in saturated fat, they believed it was due to their daily intake of coconut. Basically, it doesn't matter where you get your saturated fat, it should be avoided as much as possible. To be fair, about 80% of the Kitava smoke. However, smoking affects HDL more so than LDL, and LDL is what was high for them. And the study even looked at smokers versus nonsmokers in regards to LDL. All males, smokers and nonsmokers, met the Mayo Clinic's definition of high but near optimum levels, 100-129 mg/dL. All females, smokers and nonsmokers were high for heart disease, 130-159 mg/dL. The difference was probably due to the males being more physically active. (And this is probably why people who go Paleo can often post improved cholesterol and blood sugar levels despite the increase in saturated fat as they sharply increase their physical activity as well. So if you end up eating fatty foods or animal products on the holidays, do some push-ups, squats, sit-ups, and walk around the neighborhood or the mall with the family. But like the Masai, the Paleo community is probably still adding layers of atherosclerosis

plaque to their arteries which can lead to a heart attack just like the guy who started the jogging craze in America. Stick to plant foods.) Don't forget the "sick" population argument and the fact that heart attacks are the number one killer in the Western world. These numbers are probably way too high if you want to avoid heart attacks altogether. While there were no heart attacks, ischaemic heart disease, found among the Kitava, they are active all day long, like the Masai. And since you are probably at school or work sitting at a desk all day, your best bet is to avoid all saturated fats in your diet. Your body can make its own.)

If you're wondering which plants have a lot of potassium, it's mostly the starchy kind like potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash, and acorn squash. And guess what the Kitava eat? Starchy tubers like yams, sweet potatoes, taros, and cassavas. So if you really want to avoid hypertension, start adding starchy foods to your daily diet. But keep in mind, other whole foods like spinach, broccoli, kale, lentils, pinto beans, black beans, and bananas are pretty comparable. So just make sure you eat a *variety* of fruits and vegetables, avoid the salt shaker as much as possible, avoid processed foods, and you should be just fine. But keep in mind, the Kitava are also out in the sun (which helps to dilates your arteries/lowers your blood pressure) and are active. So get out in good weather whenever you can.

If you do add salt, do it very sparingly. You can still add a little salt to a whole foods diet *if* you prepare *all* your meals from scratch and still be below the American Heart Association recommendation of no more than 1,500 mg of sodium a day. A fourth of a teaspoon of salt a day is about 500 mg of sodium and half a teaspoon is 1,000 mg of sodium. But keep in mind if you season your food with salsa, hot sauce, ketchup, or other pre-made condiments, they tend to already have a good amount of sodium in them. So make sure to read your nutrition labels. Even plant milks tend to have some sodium in them. Unsalted vegetable broth also has a good amount of sodium in it as well (vegetables, while low in sodium, tend to have the highest natural levels of all the plant foods). Personally, I pretty much never add table salt to my food.

In short, if you do get table salt in your diet, then add some potatoes (or other starchy tubers) to your diet. And try to get some fresh air, sunshine, and exercise while you're at it.

(Since *white* potatoes are low in antioxidants for a plant food (remember, darker colors in plants generally means more antioxidants), I try to eat them with other plant foods high in antioxidants like hibiscus tea, spinach, beans, lentils, turmeric, tomatoes, etc. I think even ketchup and mustard have a decent amount of antioxidants in them as they contain tomatoes and turmeric, respectively. This way I don't have to worry about an inflammatory response in my body from a lack of antioxidants in my potatoes.)

## **Kidneys and Perspiration**

And don't worry too much about getting enough sodium as healthy kidneys are good at retaining the sodium you need. But if you're wondering about how much you sweat out, exercise for half an hour and you'll lose between 100 mg to 500 mg depending on how much sweat you produce (which is about the amount you'll find in a sports drink) so you can adjust accordingly. (However, if you're outside on a very hot day while playing a sport, you can lose up to 1,000 mg every half hour. I'll talk more about handling this situation later.) So losing too much sodium can happen to marathon runners, but if you restore your sodium during or after each workout (but you also need other electrolytes which we'll also talk about later), you won't have to worry about getting enough during each meal as I said healthy kidneys will keep sodium in. A good-sized, healthy salad full of a variety of vegetables (without dressing or salted nuts) will probably get you 100-200 mg. And that's probably enough in a day unless you sweat. There are no recommended minimum levels of sodium as no one is found deficient unless you do marathons or have a disease that will cause you to pee it out. Think about it, if our kidneys weren't able to retain sodium at their proper levels, then everyone who did a 30-day water fast should be dead at the end like those marathon runners who drink too much water. But they do it without any heart problems except for a very few who probably had kidney disease. And if you're worried about kidney disease, the top causes are adult onset

diabetes (the type that has to do with insulin sensitivity, which we know now is caused by saturated fat—avoid animal products) and high blood pressure itself (avoid the sodium). But besides animal fat, animal protein seems to produce toxins that overwork, put pressure on, and, ultimately, damage your kidneys.[157] So it's no wonder that people on a plant-based diet tend to have healthier kidneys.[158] The good news is a plant-based diet can also be used to treat kidney disease.[159]

## Iodine

And if you're going to use salt, you might as well use iodized salt. Iodine is an element and a micronutrient (so you only need a little bit and too much is bad for you, but it's still an essential nutrient). This is why it's often called a trace element or a trace mineral. However, if you're eating processed foods, you're probably getting way too much salt and you shouldn't be adding any salt, including iodized salt, to your foods. But if you're now worried about getting enough iodine you should read what I have to say before supplementing.

(There's going to be a lot more analysis. Unlike sodium, we don't know exactly how much iodine is in our food. So I ended up doing a lot more number crunching here. In short, you should have nothing to worry about as long as you eat a *variety* of fruits and vegetables. The only exception might be athletes and pregnant and breastfeeding women. But if you're in one of those groups and just want to know how to play it safe, look at the Supplement Guide in the back of the book.)

Many will claim a vegan diet will cause a goiter (swelling of the thyroid gland, a gland in your throat/voice box, so it can absorb more iodine from the blood) because that diet doesn't supply enough iodine. However, a vegan diet seems protective against hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid disease from too little iodine that often goes with 90 percent of goiter cases).[160] Compared to meat-eaters and different types of vegetarians, vegans were the least likely to develop the disease. Meat-eaters and lacto-ovo-vegetarians (vegetarians who consume dairy) had the highest rates. And the study pointed out that *obesity* has the strongest link to hypothyroidism (even just being overweight had a stronger link than diet).



Plus, another study on rats showed that a diet high in saturated fat deformed the thyroid, disrupted thyroid hormones, and of course, they gained weight.[161] And another study on mice showed that a high-fat diet and excess iodine work together to damage the thyroid.[162] Sure, we would prefer human studies, but I think they link the other studies together pretty well. Remember, milk, cheese, and butter tend to have the most saturated fat compared to other animal products. Milk and dairy products also tend to be high in iodine because of the disinfectants given to cows. That's probably why those lacto-ovo-vegetarians had the highest rates of thyroid problems in the study. And since vegans tend to be slimmer, don't drink milk or eat dairy products, and eat less saturated fat in general, that might explain why they had the lowest rates of thyroid disease amongst all the groups in the study.

## **The History and Molecular Science**

But back to goiters specifically. To better understand what is going on with goiters, let's look at its history in America and the molecular science. Two-thirds of your body's iodine is in your thyroid, it needs it to produce key hormones. When it doesn't get enough, it'll tend to enlarge to capture more iodine from the body. (Don't let people scare you from eating plant foods because of goitrogenic compounds, compounds that block iodine absorption. The levels are extremely small in the few plant foods that have them and they've been shown to not have any effect on the thyroid.[163],[164],[165] Plus, several, like isothiocyanates, have been found to be antioxidants and anticancer, especially for thyroid cancer.[166] Only soy seems to have a moderate amount of its own goitrogenic compounds, but the experimental studies show no real interference with thyroid function.[167],[168] The bottom line is if you have a goiter, it's because you're not getting enough iodine.)

Before salt was iodized, goiters were commonly found in places far from the sea with a lot of rivers and lakes, like North America's Midwest (especially close to the Great Lakes), and places that block rainwater from the sea, like North America's Intermountain regions.[169] This is because oceans are the world's main source of iodine and very little is found in the soil. The reason soil isn't rich in iodine is the same reason the

Great Lakes (and lakes in general) aren't salty like the sea: rivers and rainwater pull minerals (iodine and sodium are minerals) out to the ocean. (Whether rainwater, even that from the sea, adds or takes away minerals all depends on if it is able to drain to the ocean or not. If a valley is designed right, it can retain a lot of the minerals brought from the ocean. And this is one of the reasons why California's Central Valley, even though being close to the sea, has the world's largest patch of top-tier soil and why it is used to produce half of the nation's fruits and vegetables. This is also why some parts of this same valley have very high concentrations of salt. The other way to get iodine and other minerals, and where oceans got their iodine originally, is through volcanic activity. And that is why Yellowstone National Park is so flush and full of life even though it has several mountain ranges to the west blocking seawater rains.) To treat the high rates of goiters in places with low iodine rates in the soil, companies started to iodize their salt in the 1920s. And now goiters are virtually nonexistent in America. So many argue all salt should be iodized.

## Hyper and Hypothyroidism

However, since our oceans have so much iodine, eating a little bit of seaweed can provide so much you won't need to eat more for a long time (enough for weeks or even months). Keep in mind too much iodine can induce not only hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid from too much iodine) but also the hypothyroidism that we talked about earlier. And it seems like supplements can cause subclinical hypothyroidism even when *total* iodine intake is under most nations' maximum recommendations of 1,000 mcg. (That is 1,000 *micrograms*, not milligrams. And that amount is equal to 1 milligram. Like I said, it is a *trace* mineral.) And subclinical hypothyroidism was almost at a 50% rate for those getting a 2,000 mcg supplement.[170] Yet, the Japanese who get a lot of iodine from seaweed (1,000-3,000 mcg) had very low rates of subclinical hypothyroidism (<6%).[171],[172] Even then, it appears those with subclinical hypothyroidism had "disturbed lipid metabolism" which usually means elevated LDL levels, which might be a sign of too much saturated fat in the diet. And we know by now how much saturated fat can hurt the thyroid. But before you binge

on seaweed, they still had pretty high thyroid abnormalities in general (1 in 10) for those 40 and older (Americans have about the same rate for those 60 and older) and see what I have to say about cancer next.

## **Cancer**

Let's now look at cancer and iodine. Too much iodine seems to have a link to thyroid cancer. This has been found in several countries when they started to supplement their iodine in their salt.[173],[174] This isn't too surprising as iodine is used as a disinfectant because it is a pro-oxidant (the same iodine they used to treat goiters was used to disinfect). So just as we see iron oxidation causing rectal cancer, it isn't surprising that iodine might be causing thyroid cancer. However, just as beans have phytates to protect themselves from iron and thus us when we eat it, plants high in iodine probably have some type of phytochemical(s) to protect themselves from iodine and thus us when we eat it. So it's probably best to get your iodine through whole foods and not through a supplement. But even then, there might be a weak link between high iodine levels from seaweed and thyroid cancer.[175] That Japanese study showed the people who ate seaweed daily were 70 percent more likely to develop cancer than those who ate it twice a week or less, postmenopausal women were four times more likely. However, another study in the same journal four years later showed *no* increase in cancer rates for those same groupings, including postmenopausal women (at least nothing statistically significant).[176] Both were prospective observational studies of similar size and length, so it's hard to draw a solid conclusion. (In an attempt to explain the differences between the studies, keep in mind, Japanese markets tend to have a wider range of seaweeds to buy and some of those exotic seaweeds have a year's worth of iodine in a serving. Plus, like some exotic teas, these exotic types might have chemicals in them that are toxic to humans. So when you eat your vegetables from the sea, like your tea, stick to the popular, normal stuff.)

But looking at all the studies in their totality, it seems it's better to get your iodine through whole foods, like seaweed. And not getting enough iodine can lead to mental deficiency, deafness, stunted growth, thyroid cancer

as well, and even death. (So don't feel too bad about binging on that seaweed.) Furthermore, thyroid cancer seems to have a stronger association with obesity than anything else.[177] And, like I already mentioned, obesity is also the strongest factor in the thyroid disease hypothyroidism. These correlations might be explained by too much dietary saturated fat not only damaging the thyroid but also adding weight to your body through insulin resistance. And a vegan diet can help prevent all of that.

## Counterargument

*But increasing your levels of iodine through iodized salt have been shown to increase IQ.*

Before I answer you, let's back up and understand the science. The reason your thyroid has high levels of iodine is for hormone production. Those hormones are believed to play a role in brain development. As such, pregnant women, nursing women, and infants need to have adequate iodine levels (with nursing women probably needing the most).

But that increase in IQ was only in the 1920s when goiters were prevalent. And those lower IQ rates were only found in places where the soil was low in iodine. So it isn't specifically iodized salt but iodine itself. (Again, why not get your nutrition/iodine through whole foods?) Keep in mind, it was in the 1950s when the national highways were built in America so we are no longer bound by the vegetables grown in our local soil. We can even buy seaweed at our local markets for goodness' sake. And in soils where iodine is low, most developed countries that grow crops there now fertilize with iodine. Even a lot of less developed countries are now fertilizing their soils that are low in iodine with iodine-containing water. And, yes, they are seeing an improvement with IQ.[178],[179]

So, like I said, is it very important for pregnant women, nursing women, and infants to get enough iodine. But that's why they should be getting regular checkups and blood tests from their doctors. Chances are if you're low they'll just give you a prenatal vitamin and you'll be covered. (While it

is preferable to get your iodine through whole foods, the one exception I would make is for lactating women as iodine is constantly being lost through breastmilk. And as low iodine has a link to both breast cancer and fibrocystic breast disease and when you consider its importance to your baby's brain development, you're probably better off using a prenatal vitamin while breastfeeding. But make sure your prenatal vitamin actually has iodine in it as half of prenatal vitamins checked didn't have iodine.[180] So you need to read the labels. Interestingly, the study showed some of the prenatal vitamins used kelp (seaweed) instead of potassium iodide. While all the kelp versions did contained iodine, they varied from 33 to 610 mcg per daily dose.)

(If you're pregnant but want to go a more natural path, you could eat nori sheets. Those roasted seaweed packages found in the United States are often nori. Unfortunately, they often don't list the type of seaweed on the package, but if salt is listed in the ingredients and the Nutrition Facts label still gives a low sodium count, it should be nori as nori itself has virtually no sodium in it while other seaweeds have quite a bit. Based off of various websites I see, they list nori on the low end compared to other seaweeds of having 12-18 mcg of iodine per gram. With about 10 grams a serving, one serving of roasted seaweed will give you roughly the extra 150 mcg you are looking for as a pregnant woman. But as I'll show later, even as a pregnant woman, you might still be getting plenty of iodine through whole foods.)

Remember the study showing a low-sodium diet increased intelligence? Considering most table salt is iodized, don't you think the results would have been screwed up if iodine was that important later in life for human intelligence? If you want to be smarter, you're most likely better off with less salt.

Of course, this is probably making you wonder if you are getting enough iodine from your foods. We'll be answering that next.

## **Am I Getting Enough Iodine?**

Finally, there seems to be a lot of misinformation on iodine in regards to how much different foods contain and how much we need. The standard recommendation for adults in the U.S. is 150 mcg per day. Children should get about 90-120 mcg depending on their age. Breastfeeding and pregnant women have higher requirements of 290 mcg and 220 mcg, respectively. (I think governments overstate their guidelines for toddlers, 130 mcg, because iodine is so important to brain development, so they would rather have you get too much at this stage than not enough.) If you're worried about getting enough iodine during breastfeeding, like I said you can take a prenatal vitamin which most contain about 150 mcg of iodine. Again, read the labels as half of prenatal supplements don't contain iodine. More is probably safer than not enough. And if you get the occasional high levels of iodine, especially through a whole food like seaweed, I imagine you'll be fine if not better off.

Keep in mind, our bodies adapted to having various levels of iodine intake. You normally have about 15,000-20,000 mcg in your body with most of it, about 10,000-16,000 mcg, in the thyroid. But, unlike sodium and other electrolytes in your body, your kidneys can't hold on to it (as far as I can tell from reading the medical literature, that's probably why we lose about 90 percent of what we eat daily through our urine[181], or about 100-200 mcg, and thus the 150 mcg daily recommendation). While your kidneys can't hold on to iodine, your thyroid can. Your thyroid has a 100-day half-life with iodine. So if your thyroid got 1,000 mcg from your diet in one day, 100 days later it would still have 500 mcg of it. Your other organs can also hold on to iodine for weeks to months at a time. But iodine is mostly used for your thyroid (though your body needs the hormones the thyroid produces with iodine). It seems to play some minor roles in other tissues, but what it does exactly is unknown. While your kidneys may not have a mechanism to retain iodine when needed, your kidneys are very good at getting rid of excess iodine, at least if it's from a whole food like seaweed. Several Japanese studies show up to 97% urine excretion of daily consumed iodine of up to 30,000 mcg/L.[182] And after that, it goes back to the standard 100-200 mcg. And, as I'll prove later, getting that 150 mcg of iodine through whole foods in a developed country isn't hard at all. But, like sodium, iodine is lost through your sweat. So athletes who sweat a lot will need to take measures to make sure

they're getting enough iodine. Again, I think it's best to just restore your electrolytes and iodine levels right after a workout so you don't have to worry about adjusting your intake levels during meals. But when it comes to sodium and iodine, this is the only place where you might get into trouble, so I'm going to take a good portion of the book here to talk about what you can do. I'll talk about getting iodine through whole foods after that.

## **Restoring sodium and iodine after a workout**

(If the math here makes your head spin—and I don't blame you—just look at the Supplement Guide at the back of the book.)

Sports drinks, like Gatorade, tend not to contain iodine. Well, you can always make your own sports drink. While I said to stay away from fruit drinks, the one exception is probably right after or during a workout when your body can use the sugar. Based on the different numbers I see in studies, I would guess about 3-15 mcg of iodine is lost in your average 30-minute workout (and like I said before, that'll also be about 100-500 mg of sodium lost). You can add an eighth of a teaspoon of iodized salt to get your 250 mg of sodium and 30 mcg of iodine. (Iodized salt in America is supposed to contain 45-75 mg of iodine per kilogram (kg) of salt. But a study showed more than half tested fell below that.[183] So we'll take the lowest number of the range, that's about 45 mcg of iodine per gram (g) of salt. There are 5 grams per teaspoon of salt, so 225 mcg of iodine. Divide by 8 and you get about 30 mcg of iodine.) Or if you want to avoid using table salt, you can use something like strawberries and celery. Strawberries tend to pick up and hold more iodine than any other plant. After biofortification, they can hold 60-400 mcg/100g.[184] A cup of whole strawberries is quite a bit more than 100 grams. So I'm pretty confident that'll get you at least 15 mcg even if it isn't biofortified. Add about 3 cups of chopped celery to your strawberries and you'll get about 250 mg of sodium. Of course, you can add an apple or orange for taste (just so you know, like most fruits, they have pretty much no sodium in them).

Or you can avoid the sugar altogether and juice vegetables. Remember, leafy greens and vegetables, in general, tend to have a lot of iodine,

sodium, and potassium in them. Beets, spinach, and celery should give you a nice amount of those minerals. (Don't forget beets have been shown to improve athletic performance.) And when you add regular tap water, that's going to be adding your calcium and magnesium ions. As I'll prove later, you lose very little calcium and magnesium through sweat so the amount in your tap water should be fine.

So that should cover most people who workout at a gym. (And you probably noticed while looking at the numbers that most people won't even need a DIY sports drink, especially if you don't break a sweat, that they can easily get what they need through eating whole foods. I'll be talking more about that later.)

However, if you're outside on a hot day playing an intense sport like soccer, you can lose up to 2,000 mg of sodium and about 50 mcg of iodine an hour.[185] Almost half of the athletes in that study had a mild goiter.

(For those interested in how I've been getting my numbers and whether you need to worry about other electrolytes, I'll talk about it here. Per the study above, we lose about 37 mcg of iodine per liter of sweat. Since you lose about 0.8 liters of sweat during indoor recreational sports/working out per hour, that's about 30 mcg iodine lost per hour or 15 mcg per half an hour. But a lot of people barely break a sweat in an air-conditioned gym so I started at a fifth of that. That's where I got the number above. They also said there is about 1270 mg of sodium per liter of sweat. That times 0.8 liters gives about 1,000 mg. And that's how I got about 500 mg per half an hour workout. Again, considering that most people in an air-conditioned gym barely break a sweat, I gave the range of 100-500 mg sodium lost during a workout. Potassium and calcium lost was minimal. They didn't look at magnesium or chloride nor could I find other studies covering it. But I we can calculate that as the amount of electrolytes lost seem to be in the same ratios as they are found in your blood, as your sweat glands don't appear to regulate your electrolytes lost through sweat. It involves converting meq/L (milliNormal per Liter) to mg/L and then multiplying that by the 5 liters of blood in the body. Potassium and calcium is about less than 1,000 mg each in your blood (which is consistent with the amounts found in our sweat per the study).



Magnesium is about 150 mg. So the amount sweated out is probably undetectable and is probably why they didn't talk about it in the study. We've already covered chloride being almost equal to sodium in our blood, 18,000 milligrams. As such we can assume we lose about the same amount in our sweat. But I wanted to make sure. Luckily, they use chloride levels in sweat to test for cystic fibrosis. They say 39 mmol/L or less means no cystic fibrosis. So we'll take the worse case but still healthy scenario of 39 mmol/L, which converts to 1,380 mg/L. So about the same rate as sodium and about the same ratio of chloride to sodium in our blood. Remember, milligrams is mass so we have 40% more sodium atoms in our blood and sweat than chloride atoms. So if table salt (sodium chloride, a one to one ratio by atoms and about a 4 to 6 ratio by mass, respectively) is getting you enough sodium, it's certainly getting you enough chloride atoms. If you're now worried about getting enough chloride without table salt, foods that are naturally high in sodium (spinach, celery, seaweed, etc.) are also naturally high in chloride in roughly the same amount. And your kidneys retain chloride just like sodium. So, also like sodium, there is no recommended minimum. But the point I'm trying to make is that athletes should be fine using table salt since it'll get them plenty of chloride as well.)

So here's what you can do. Add a fourth a teaspoon of iodized salt to get 500 mg of sodium and 60 mcg of iodine and three-fourths of kosher or sea salt (pure salt) to get the remaining 1,500 mg of sodium and split that between two 16-ounce water bottles (32 ounces altogether or 4 cups). Throw in some juiced fruits or vegetables for taste, sugar, antioxidants, and other trace minerals. You will need something to mask the salty taste. If you add a lemon, a lime, and 4 cubes of sugars (60 calories) to a 16-ounce bottle, it tastes surprisingly like Gatorade. Hibiscus tea will probably be another good thing to use as it has a lot of antioxidants, lowers your blood pressure, and has a fruity taste to it. Now you're making your own natural and probably healthier versions of lemon-lime and fruit punch Gatorade. Then drink one of those after or during (but only *after* you've started to sweat a lot) every hour you play a sport out in the hot sun. Everything else you drink should be just water. Now your student athlete and marathon runner has a sports drink based on the science. Just make sure they're getting enough potassium in their diet so

their body can filter the excess sodium if they're not sweating enough. Those athletes sweating heavily outside were losing about 250 mg of potassium an hour. (So when you apply the math nothing to really worry about for everyone else working out inside. But if you're an athlete and you're remembering the 1,000 mg in our blood and scared by that 250 mg number, 98 percent of your potassium isn't in your blood but in your cells and your body can pull it out as needed. Still, considering potassium's heart benefits and ability to help you pee out excess sodium, it wouldn't hurt to add some potassium to our sports drink.) For athletes who want to make sure that they're keeping their potassium levels topped off, add half a cup of coconut water to our 32 ounce mixture (there is no saturated fat in coconut water). It'll give about 250 mg of sodium and about 600 mg of potassium a cup. So about half the sodium of our DIY sports drink per cup. Unfortunately, I can't find information about its iodine content, but being a plant food it probably has some.

For those interested in pink Himalayan salt, while I couldn't find a study on the mineral content, I found the following from what seemed like a somewhat reliable source online: chloride, 590 mg/g; sodium, 380 mg/g; sulfur, 12 mg/g; calcium, 4 mg/g; potassium, 3.5 mg/g; and magnesium 0.1 mg/g. There isn't enough potassium or magnesium to really help, but it's interesting that they're there nonetheless. However, the amount of calcium might be enough to make a difference as those athletes on a hot day were losing about 20 mg an hour and you'll get about 10 mg in half a teaspoon. But calcium is probably the least important mineral when it comes to sweat as bones are a huge reserve for this electrolyte. So you can always wait until you get it from food. A second source online gave the following measurements: chloride, 590 mg/g; sodium, 380 mg/g; sulfur, 1.7 mg/g; calcium, 1.4 mg/g; potassium, 3 mg/g; and magnesium, 20 mg/g. Here there is enough magnesium to make a difference, but not calcium. So mineral content seems to vary a good deal by brand. For iodine, the first source said less than 100 mcg/g for iodine so about twice the amount found in most iodized salt. (It said less than 0.1 grams which I assume they mean per kilogram as they state that for just about all the their other minerals. I worry this might not be accurate as they used a different measurement method for iodine and one other mineral which is also stated as less than 0.1 grams. This is why I prefer peer-reviewed

scientific studies.) The second source gave about 1 mcg/g. Big difference. All the minerals after that, about 80, were in microscopic amounts. Unfortunately, we don't know what those minerals do to your body. But we do know most are present. Trace amounts of aluminum, bromine, rubidium, and vanadium are found throughout the body. Arsenic, gold, cobalt, chromium, indium, antimony, and titanium are also found in various amounts in human organs.[186] Just how iodine plays a mysterious role in tissue health, besides being used by the thyroid, these other trace minerals might be used by the body for various things. Though you could probably argue we also get those minerals in various plant foods. For example, there is titanium in your plants. And trace amounts of it seem to really improve plant health.[187] As with iodine, plants tend to absorb whatever minerals happen to be in the soil. So your body probably evolved to handle a variety of minerals, even toxic ones. Though, as we'll see with iodine, what minerals get absorbed and held onto the most will vary with each plant. Thus, as always, eat a *variety* of fruits and vegetables, so you don't get too many toxic minerals (like mercury or arsenic) or not enough necessary trace minerals. The point I'm trying to make here is that you probably shouldn't be afraid of taking Himalayan salt because of the exotic trace minerals. But you shouldn't take Himalayan salt to get those exotic trace minerals either as you should get enough through common foods (both plant and animal). (I would still venture to say it's best to get your trace minerals through plants. Why? Because since plants are in the soil and can't move, I imagine they would have to evolve some type of mechanism to protect itself from toxic minerals in the soil by not absorbing them or by binding them to something.) Besides, the mineral content for Himalayan salt seems inconsistent going from one brand to another. But for your DIY sports drink, you're probably fine replacing a fourth of a teaspoon of your kosher or sea salt with Himalayan salt to make sure you get enough but not too much iodine.

(If you're wondering about how much of the non-electrolyte minerals, like iodine, we lose through sweat, it doesn't seem to be a concern. For zinc you lose about 5 percent of your Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA, how much you should be eating each day) per hour of sweating. So that's about 0.5 mg. And I would guess for athletes out in the hot sun about 1

mg. For iron, you lose only about 1 percent of your RDA per hour.[188] It seems like only iodine is the exception to this pattern.)

While iodine is a problem for athletes, sodium loss still seems to be the main issue. That's probably why we hear about marathon runners dying and having heart problems from not having enough sodium and never really hearing about them having goiters. So you can see the problem sweating too much in the hot sun can cause us. This is probably why we, like many animals, crave salt so much. Better alive with high blood pressure, even with a shorter life, than dead today with low blood pressure. But even better is alive today with low blood pressure and a long life. And thanks to modern society, we can do that. And this is probably why a lot of Paleo people who work out a lot swear animal products make them feel better. It's not that it's better, rather they are probably getting the sodium their bodies want, though unnaturally as animal flesh is naturally low in sodium. But if you don't sweat a lot, then you need to avoid daily excess levels of sodium and supplemental iodine unless you want thyroid cancer and dysfunction or cardiovascular death.

But what if you work out and don't want to make or drink a sports drink? What if you only want to eat whole foods? Well, if you just go to your local gym and work out for half an hour, a cup or two of beets will do you just fine. A cup of raw beets will give you about 100 mg of sodium, 130 mg for cooked. Being a dense vegetable it'll probably give you about 10 mcg of iodine per cup (more on how I got this number next). So for your average 30-minute workout that should be more than enough sodium, even if you do sweat a decent amount, by the time you include the sodium and iodine in all your other foods, especially if you're living in a developed country. And you're probably fine eating a sodium-rich whole food *before* you work out as it'll take time for your body to start absorbing it, unlike a juice. So you don't have to worry about your kidneys pulling it out of your blood before you can start sweating it out. Again, don't forget, beets have been shown to improve athletic performance (plus, beets dilate your arteries and thus lowers your blood pressure). You can't go wrong with a whole food diet. But if you don't have beets, celery and carrots together should be a good alternative for your sodium and iodine. So only athletes and marathon runners sweating a lot will have to worry about drinking a

sodium and iodine rich sports drink. But that's enough about drinks. Let's talk about food.

## Iodine in Our Food

So how much iodine is in our food? While many say potatoes are high in iodine, some studies show they are some of the lowest in certain regions.[189],[190],[191] They show as little as a few micrograms per kilogram. (For those who read the studies, 1 microgram = 1 mcg = 1  $\mu$ g = 1  $\gamma$  (gamma). Gamma is a symbol that has been deprecated but you'll see it in the older studies I cite. Most medical literature will show " $\mu$ g" ( $\mu$  stands for micron) for micrograms to prevent doctors from confusing it with milligrams and potentially giving a lethal dose of something.) The highest plant foods in these studies (besides seaweed) by weight were regular vegetables. So probably the greens or vegetables you would use in a salad have the most natural levels of iodine (same with sodium). And, again, a lot of it has to do with what soil everything is grown in (it ranges anyway from 10 mcg/kg to 1000 mcg/kg in soil dry weight). However, if the potatoes are *biofortified*, then, yes, you will probably get about half of the mcg recommended daily from a single meal.[192] But how do you know if your potatoes are biofortified? (Biofortified can mean a range of things, but in regard to iodine, at least with most of the research I've come across, it means they enrich the soil with iodine.)

But it's not as bad as I'm making it sound. Let's look at potatoes in America before biofortification and see if you could still get enough iodine. A study in the 1930s looking at potatoes in Minnesota (right next to the Great Lakes, so the eastern soil should be very low in iodine) found that potatoes from the western soil had more iodine and people had lower rates of goiters there compared to people living in the eastern soil.[193] The rate was about 2.5 times more iodine in the western potatoes (about 22 mcg/100g). That's a pretty high number. But the middle part of the United States is some of the most fertile (since the rainwater there can't easily drain to the ocean) which Minnesota is close to. So let's look at a state closer to the ocean. Another study done in the 1930s for Pennsylvania found about 7 mcg/100g on average, with the most being about 20 mcg/100g and the lowest being 1 mcg/100g.[194] (For those

looking at the study, p.p.b., parts per billion, equals 1 mcg/kg, as there are 1 billion micrograms in a kilogram.) (Those extremely low levels came from areas, which are now state parks, covered in rivers. And if you look at a terrain map, you'll see they're also covered in valleys carved out by the dendritic drainage systems a long time ago. And those old rivers carried the iodine out of the soil. But I imagine most modern farms wouldn't bother growing potatoes in a place like that.) So if you get potatoes from western Minnesota back in the 1930s, about 3 cups will give you more than 120 mcg. (Cups are a measure of volume. And grams are a measure of mass. But a cup of potatoes is about 200 grams). When you consider 2 heaping cups of leafy greens will give you 10 mcg and 2 cups of solid vegetables (like carrots) will give you 20 mcg, then you get to 150 mcg.[195] But if you're eating potatoes from Pennsylvania back in the 1930s, you would have to get about 8 cups to get to a little less than 120 mcg. Sounds like a tall order, but when you consider the guy on the all potato diet was eating 20 potatoes a day (1 medium-sized potato is roughly 1 cup), it probably isn't that hard. So, back in the 1930s, the people who got goiters were either in very poor soil or they weren't eating enough. (If you're wondering why those levels in the potatoes from those first three studies were so low, it had to do with the fact they were by the sea where rainwater can carry soil iodine out to the ocean, like Norway or the Chinese Fujian province, or it probably had to do with the Chernobyl accident of 1986. The third study was from Belarus and the Chernobyl accident was on the border of Ukraine and Belarus. It threw radioactive iodine all over their soil that was already the richest in the country for iodine.[196] So they were forced to move their crops to the northern less iodine-rich soil. And those who didn't had a higher rate of thyroid cancer. Even then, the average iodine levels are pretty low in that country from the start as there is no volcanic activity there.)

But we live in modern times and you probably live in America if you're reading this. Your produce most likely came from the California Central Valley or the fertile middle section of the United States. If not, there is a very good chance that your potatoes will be biofortified with iodine. And beans have about 18 mcg/100g and rice 14 mcg/100g so if you want to eat them instead you're also fine.[197] Sweet potatoes contain about 12 mcg/100g.[198] (If you look at this study, you'll notice, when grown in the

right soil, potatoes and beans can contain very high levels naturally, 62 mcg/100g and 53 mcg/100g, respectively. And this is typically the levels you see when you biofortified them.[199] And if you look at *that* study and wonder why their foods are already high in iodine *before* biofortification, it's because Nigeria has many recently extinct volcanoes in the area. See, science can explain everything. And the science is clear on what kind of diet you should have and how much sodium you should eat.) You're not going to be iodine deficient if you eat plenty of whole foods in a developed country. Even if you drink plenty of water in a day, you'll get about 10 mcg from that alone.[200] (Remember, water pulls out minerals, like iodine, from the soil. This is why you want a *hard* water, not a soft water, system at home. Unfortunately, activated carbon filters are very good at removing it from your water. This probably has to do with treatment plants turning iodide (ionic, single atom version of iodine) into a compound (usually, two iodine atoms joined together) making it larger and harder to pass through the activated charcoal filter.) And don't forget, strawberries can have a lot of iodine in them. So I think the best strategy is to eat a *variety* of fruits and vegetables, and have the occasional seaweed (they do make vegan sushi rolls, again, just be careful with the high in sodium soy sauce) or iodized table salt (a fourth of a teaspoon of iodized salt will give you about 60 mcg of iodine) and you'll be just fine. The only exception would be if you are running marathons or sweating for hours in the gym or if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, then, yes, you'll probably need to take some extra steps to make sure you are getting enough iodine.

## Protecting Your Thyroid

Finally, keep in mind your thyroid and body needs the mineral selenium to protect itself from the oxidative effects of iodine. While iodine is naturally a pro-oxidant, selenium is naturally an antioxidant. Without selenium, your thyroid produces hydrogen peroxide which starts to damage your thyroid.[201] It may also protect you from over and under thyroid stimulation.[202] Like iodine, your thyroid also needs selenium to produce key hormones. Where do you get selenium? Whole foods. Brazilian nuts, sunflower seeds, tofu, black beans, chia seeds, whole wheat pasta, mushrooms, brown rice, and oats just to name a few.[203] Even seaweed

has trace amounts in it.[204] And this might partly explain why we tend to see an increase in thyroid cancer and thyroid dysfunction more so for supplements than whole foods. So eat your whole foods, but eat a *variety* of whole foods.

While iodine might seem confusing, just try to use whole foods to get your nutrition, including those from the sea. And, remember, thyroid dysfunction and cancer have a stronger link to meat, saturated fat, and obesity than anything else. Plants appear to be protective for both thyroid dysfunction and thyroid cancer. It appears best to get your iodine through whole foods and not through supplements or salt. If you're pregnant, breastfeeding, or have a toddler, have your doctor check your iodine levels and your toddler's iodine levels to be safe. And if you are going to use table salt, I would still use an iodized one as you should only be using a *little* bit of it anyway (and thus only a little bit of oxidative stress) and it'll help make sure you get enough iodine. Plus, the plants you should be eating anyway with their various antioxidants will still protect you from the pro-oxidant effects of iodine. So eat your fruits and vegetables.

## Conclusion

So what should you do about salt? Like animal products, at the very least you should reduce your intake.

Remember, the American Heart Association recommends *no more* than 1,500 mg of sodium a day. And studies show that less than 1 gram (1,000 mg) a day will give the best results. There is no recommended minimum. Unless you sweat a lot or have kidney disease, you shouldn't worry about getting enough sodium, you should worry about getting too much. Again, athletes and people who sweat a lot should just restore their sodium and iodine levels during or after a workout so they don't have to adjust the amounts in their meals. But everyone else should stay away from sports drinks. And if you're in a developed country, you're probably getting *way* too much instead of not enough. Yes, you need *some* sodium, but that can be found in whole foods. Most vegetables will have about 20 mg a cup (most fruits have pretty much none). And, remember, a fourth of a teaspoon of salt a day is about 500 mg of sodium and half a teaspoon is



1,000 mg of sodium. Don't forget that many condiments like salsa, hot sauce, or ketchup can have a high amount (about 100 mg a tablespoon). And also don't forget, a lot of meat is injected with a salt brine. Processed foods, salted meats, and foods prepared in restaurants (they tend to use kosher or sea salt, not iodized salt) are why most Americans get in the unhealthy range of 3,000 to 6,000 mg a day. And if you eat that stuff often, you'll end up with hypertension just like them.

But, remember, the studies show it's progressive, so even if all you do is reduce the salt in your diet you should see benefits regardless.

And reducing sodium in your diet means you'll have to take time to read the nutrition labels of processed foods if you eat them (even vegan ones can be loaded with sodium and saturated fat). You don't need to add up the milligrams, but you do need to be aware of what you're putting in your mouth. And the best thing you can do is to stop eating processed foods (don't be eating those salty chips), prepare your own foods, and keep eating plenty of fruits and vegetables.

# You're Wrong About Working Out

*Always consult your doctor before starting a workout program.*

And I was motivated to add yet another chapter to this book. Why? Well, I found out some very interesting stuff about working out and I found, unfortunately, more headline science.

At this point, perhaps I should make this book an all-encompassing one about health. Ignoring treatments for various diseases, the four pillars of good health are sleep, nutrition, exercise, and socializing. We've cover nutrition so let's briefly cover sleep and socializing before we move on to exercise. I'm not citing studies for these two areas as the science is pretty clear, there really isn't that much misinformation out there about them, and if we do learn something new it probably won't be a game changer when it comes to your actions toward them.

With sleep you need an adequate amount each day and you should go to sleep and wake up at the same times each day. What is an adequate amount? Basically, sleep until you feel rested. Anyone saying there is a specific amount of time you should always sleep is trying to sell you something. You already have a bodily system that tells you how much sleep you need each day. Don't make it complicated. Now if you don't get enough sleep in a day, unfortunately, you really can't catch up on it in another. In fact, too much sleep can be harmful. You can, however, take a power nap in the middle of the day which will help your brain clean out the adenosine (a natural byproduct of normal brain activity that needs to be cleaned out for your brain to function properly). Adenosine is actually one of the chemicals that make you feel sleepy. And the way caffeine works to make you feel more alert is by blocking the adenosine receptor sites in your brain. More sleep, however, isn't the same as napping as there are other specific biological functions taking place that can actually be harmful if done too much, which can give you a higher risk of stroke and heart attack. This happens because your body glues everything back together while you sleep. But too much "glue" can restrict muscles, like

those in your heart. But napping pretty much just takes care of the adenosine in your brain (about beyond 20 or 30 minutes is when other sleep systems start to engage). And napping appears to be so beneficial that pretty much everyone should take a 10- to 15-minute power nap in the middle of the day as it'll make you more productive later on.

As far as when to go to sleep, like I said, try to do it at regular times. While you don't necessarily need to go to sleep at sunset, it is best to wake when the sun comes up as it appears that waking up in the hours just before that stresses out your body the most. Probably because it expects the sun to wake you up and relies on chemicals that start to be produced in your brain when light/sunlight starts to hit your body and eyes (even through your eyelids). From an evolutionary point of view, this makes a lot of sense. A campfire probably kept our ancestors up beyond when the sunset, but they probably still relied on the sun to wake them up. I know this is a luxury not everyone has because of their work or kids, but at the least try to go to bed and wake up at the same times each day as it appears that your body will adapt to it in time.

And that brings us to socializing. So what does socializing have to do with being healthy? A lot more than you think. In short, the people around you affect your emotions, which in turn affect your hormone levels (like cortisol, the stress hormone, or oxytocin, the so-called love hormone), and your hormones affect your tissues (cortisol tends to damage your tissues and oxytocin tends to repair them). So it isn't surprising that studies find those who spend more time with their friends who make them feel good tend to be healthier. And those who spend more time alone or with people who stress them out tend to have a shorter life. And I'm sure there are plenty of studies showing the same effects when you donate or help others as it makes you feel good, creates that sense of belonging, and thus releases those beneficial hormones. So be social, help your friends, and be part of your community. Actually, the science shows the best living situation for your health and happiness is one with your friends, a community that you enjoy. Unfortunately, the Western world seems to advocate isolating living situations (like owning your own house) or social situations that will stress you out (like living in a dorm with a complete stranger) instead of living with a group of friends you enjoy.

So those are three of the four pillars of health. Let's move on to the final pillar: exercise.

As I said, there is some exciting news here, but to convince you of it, I'm going to use some graphs here. Why? Well, nutrition and convincing people to go vegan is pretty easy as everyone knows that the more fruits and vegetables you consume the better and that meat, at the very least red meat, tends to be bad for you (but as you now know, from reading this book, *all* animal products are bad for you). So convincing people to only eat fruits and vegetables and no animal products (a plant-based diet) isn't that hard. It only required me to disprove the false claims made by the Paleo community by showing how they used bad studies or improperly read them.

But what I'm going to show you with exercise goes against the conventional wisdom we've all been taught when it comes to working out (that we pretty much have to go to the gym just short of every day to be really healthy). So I'm going to finally have a few graphs and tables in this book to help convince you.

So what is that general advice we've all been taught? Well, that we have to go the gym 3 to 5 times a week to be healthy, that we have to do cardio *and* weight lifting, and, since we broke down our muscles so much from lifting weights, we need to eat a lot of protein before and after.

But the new science emerging suggests we only need to work out once or twice a week to get all the benefits (and not for that long either). And we really don't need to lift heavy weights at the gym, so we don't need to gobble down tons of protein (those protein supplements are pretty expensive and often contain heavy metals as they aren't regulated), to get the maximum health benefits.

Too good to be true? I know, I couldn't believe it myself. But the numbers don't lie.

Let's look at a study that examined over 50,000 subjects (18 to 100 years old) for 15 years.[205]

What did it find? That all joggers, *regardless* of dose, frequency, or speed, had a 30% and 45% lower risk of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality, respectively.

This included runners who did *less* than 50 minutes, less than 6 miles, who only worked out once or twice a week, and at less than 6 mph. The only thing that really made a difference was if they stayed runners or not in their lives. So consistency is a *must* when it comes to working out.

The study then pretty much suggests in the conclusion to run 5-10 minutes a day at slow speeds. I sort of disagree with their conclusion (I'll go into that later), but I think the authors were obviously trying to give the reader the bare minimum they could do to get the best results. But, remember, even working out once or twice a week produced the *same* results. In theory, can't we just work out on the weekends and aim for a total of 30-45 minutes of exercise for the week?

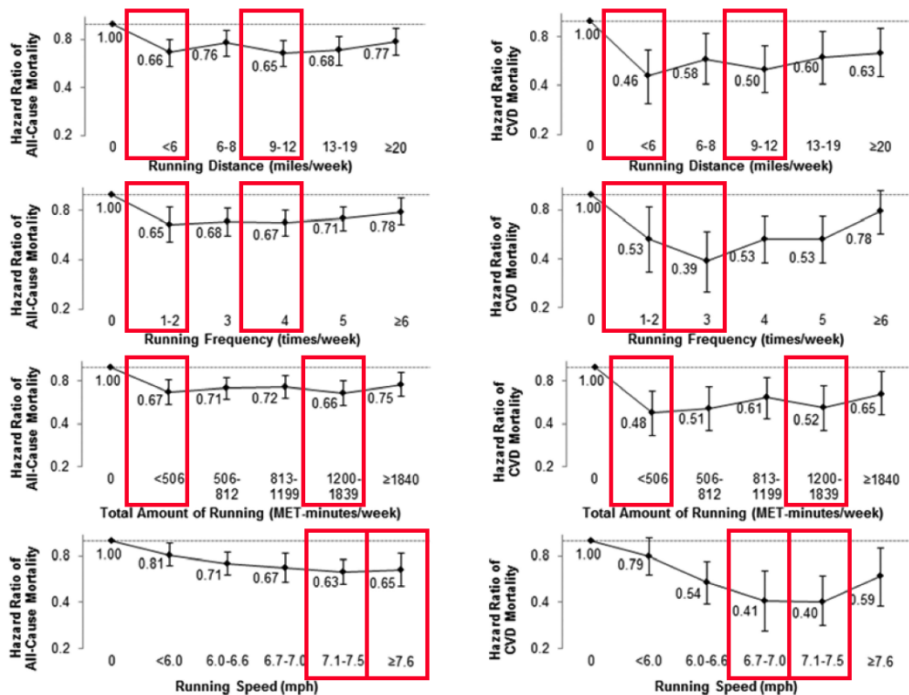
But why would we want this strategy? Because it addresses the fundamental problem of working out 3-5 times a week. Making time to go to the gym after a busy work or even school day is a pain. You have to remember to work out on certain days. You also have to remember to bring your workout clothes. You have to drive to the gym or where ever you're going to go to work out. Change clothes. Follow some boring routine for an hour. Shower. Drive back. Rest. Then you probably need to get some work done while still being tired/sore from the gym. And you have to do more laundry now cause you have a lot of gym clothes to wash each week. This is all even worse if you are stressing out about a project you need to get done by Friday but are forcing yourself to make time to work out during the week. Those are hours you could be working or de-stressing. So it's no wonder people give up on the gym and just live their lives (even though we all need exercise to be healthy).

But like I said, consistency is a *must* when it comes to exercise. Thus, we should only advocate a workout routine that people will *actually* do, not one that will make them feel guilty.

So can we just work out just once or twice a week?

While the study did say it was more or less an equal reduction in each category for the week, we did see some groupings do slightly better than others (especially for speed in regard to cardiovascular health). I'll insert the graphs to make things clear.

On the left is all-cause mortality rates and on the right is cardiovascular disease (CVD) mortality rates. By row, we have distance, frequency, MET-minutes/week (more on this later), and speed. I put a box around the best and second best scores for each graph.



As you can see, with the exception of speed (intensity), the best or second best numbers (the lower the better) for each graph always came from the lowest groupings.

(I think why you see the CVD mortality rate being so drastically low for those jogging 3 times a week (relatively speaking, as all the groups had about the same amount of benefits) has to do with how serious they are about health. Joggers who make time to religiously jog three times a

week (probably Monday, Wednesday, Friday, the ideal plan we've been historically taught as it gives the highest frequency for the week while still giving joints plenty of time to heal) has to do with the fact that if they are that serious about exercise, they are probably taking other health factors, like sleep and nutrition, just as serious too. And we should know by now how important diet is in regard to cardiovascular disease.)

Now what is this MET-minutes/week number? It is simply a measure of effort over time. (MET stands for Metabolic Equivalent of Task.) So if you did an activity rated with a MET of 4 for 30 minutes, you simply multiply the two numbers and get 120 MET-minutes. Or you can increase your effort and decrease your time for the same number. So doing an activity with a MET rating of 8 for 15 minutes would still give you 120 MET-minutes.

So if you jog at a speed of 7.5 mph that'll give you a MET rating of about 10 (MET varies by individual, so this is just an approximation). If you do it for 30 to 45 minutes, you get 300 to 450 MET-minutes, below the 500 MET-minutes/week (one of the optimal groupings). It also puts us at below 6 miles jogged, which is, again, another optimal group in the study for mortality rates. Have that total of 30 to 45 minutes jogging come from one or two workouts a week, then you are, yet again, in an optimal grouping when it comes to mortality, all-cause and cardiovascular, per the study.

So not only can you jog only once or twice a week, jogging once or twice a week at 7.5 mph for under 45 minutes is the *best* jogging program you can do for your health.

*That's amazing!*

I know right?

But you should still build up to that if you are new to working out as jogging for 45 minutes straight at 7.5 mph could *literally* kill some of the people reading this right now. And, as always, consult your doctor before doing a new workout plan.

And in the name of good science, we should explore other studies (we'll look at another one later) and other evidence. Here is one from my personal account.

After reading a news article reporting on this study, it gave the advice, as is found in the conclusion of the study, to jog each day for 5-10 minutes under 6 mph. So I started to jog for a minute, then two, then three, until I built up to 7 minutes each day at a slow speed (I even measured my speed with my phone). And this was after reading a lot about proper running form and helpful techniques. So as far I know, I was doing nothing wrong or improper with my workouts. But after a few weeks of that, I started to get terrible pains, like little pebbles were in my toes, enough to force me to stop jogging. If you do the same exercise each day, you're going to get repetitive use injuries. With the exception of walking, our bodies are designed for long rest periods and variety. I think this is further proven by the graphs above. The *least* optimal groupings, besides those who didn't work out at all, were those working out every day. Again, even more reason to do your workout once or twice a week.

(If you do go read the study, there was another graph in it showing minutes jogged (*not* MET-minutes) per week and mortality. (I'm not showing the graph as it has a bunch of overlays which makes it hard to read and confusing to see what is going on.) Other than the non-jogging group, those with equal to or less than 50 minutes did the worst for CVD disease. And, oddly enough, the 51-80 minutes did the best. But this was an error in the graph. If you look at Table 3 in the study, they accidentally pulled the all-cause mortality number for that time and matched it against the cardiovascular mortality number. The 50 minutes or fewer group actually had the best number of 0.45 (a 65% reduction in mortality). The numbers are as follows: Non-runner, 1.00; <51 mins., 0.45; 51-80 mins., 0.52; 81-119 mins., 0.60; 120-175 mins., 0.53; and >175 mins., 0.67. Less seems to be more when it comes to working out.)

The overall message seems to be less time working out at a higher intensity and more time for your body to heal is optimal.

But why is this?



I mean why in the course of evolution would we be designed like this, to work out really hard once or twice a week? Actually, I never answered the question of why from an evolutionary perspective would our bodies react so badly from eating animal flesh?

If you think in terms of the African savanna, it makes a lot of sense. According to paleobiologists, meat was a rare commodity back then as it had to be hunted so we got most of our calories through plants.[206] As stated by Amanda Henry and followed up by the author of the article:

“Frankly, I think that misses half of the story. They want meat, sure. But what they actually live on is plant foods.” What’s more, she found starch granules from plants on fossil teeth and stone tools, which suggests humans may have been eating grains, as well as tubers, for at least 100,000 years—long enough to have evolved the ability to tolerate them.

But seeing that meat is high in energy (fat) and contains other nutrients our bodies might be low in if malnourished (like cholesterol), our bodies adapted to soak it up like a sponge when we did eat it as not having enough calories and nutrition to live was a real issue back then.[207][208] All that your genes care about is living long enough to reproduce, not to live to a ripe old age with healthy arteries. So when we go from meat being an occasional thing (I would guess once a week or even once a month) to having it every day, or even with each meal, our bodies absorbing all that excess fat and cholesterol ends up wrecking our system.

(If you are wondering what the difference is between fat and cholesterol, let’s first say what they have in common: they are both lipids. That means they are in the same chemical category as oils and waxes. However, unlike fat, you can’t break down cholesterol through exercise. It needs something to bind to so that the body can flush out excess amounts. That’s why oatmeal and other plant foods are so good at reducing cholesterol. They have chemicals in them, like certain fibers, to bind to it.)

Even when things got better for the human species, it was with the agricultural age. So we got more grains to eat, but meat was still rare, something for the rich. And there was a lot more poor than rich back then as it is now. Thus, human evolution would still favor plants as our main food source. So we are designed to eat plant foods and that includes starchy tubers and grains that you have to cook. Remember how the poor in India and China had pretty much no heart disease? That's because they were eating a proper diet based on our evolution.

But how does this relate to exercise? Well, back to the African savanna. If meat was that rare, then so was running at prey full speed (or jogging, however we did it) as well as running for your life from a predator as we lived in tribes (there is strength and intimidation in numbers that even nature respects). But we *did* once in a while run at full speed for whatever reason (even when it was done for the occasional play). That would support the idea that we are designed for sudden, intense exercise and a lot of recovery time. And that seems to agree with the jogging study we just cited.

*I don't know. That is only one study. Do you have any other studies supporting the occasional workout being ideal?*

I sure do. Let's look at a study that specifically looked at the weekend warriors.

In this study, they looked at about 64,000 adults (40 years or older) over 14 years that resulted in about 9,000 deaths.[209]

The study split the group into four main categories: inactive (individuals who did not work out or do any real physical activity), insufficient activity (those who didn't meet the World Health Organization's recommended 150 min/week of moderate exercise or 75 min/week of vigorous exercise), weekend warrior (those who met the WHO's recommendation through 1 or 2 sessions a week), and regular activity (those who met the WHO's recommendation through 3 or more sessions a week).

Again, we have four groups: inactive, insufficient, weekend warrior, and regular exercisers.

Comparing the three workout groups to the inactive group, they pretty much had *equally* decreased their rates of all-cause mortality by 30%, cardiovascular disease mortality by 40%, and cancer mortality by 20%.

(Cancer rates were slightly in favor of more working out by a few percentage points. The insufficient activity group averaged 60 minutes working out a week, the weekend warriors averaged about 300 minutes working out a week, and the regular activity had about 450 minutes working out in a week. But, again, these few percentage points' difference might have to do with regular workout people being more thoughtful with their other health factors, like sleep and nutrition. Keep in mind, just how serious joggers usually go 3 times a week, serious gym goers typically go 5 times a week (Monday through Friday while alternating muscle groups) and eTable 9 seems to confirm this. After one or two workout sessions, cancer mortality rates go up (as well as all other mortality rates), drop significantly for 5 sessions, and then start to go back up again. So it probably isn't how much you work out but how much you take care of all your other health factors that account for the lower cancer rates.)

*I'm curious; did the people who worked out twice a week do better than those who did it once a week?*

That's a good question. We know the study states that about half of the weekend warriors got their exercise once a week and the other half got theirs twice a week. So we have plenty of data to pull reasonable conclusions. Look at eTable 9, all mortality rates of people who worked out once a week compared to twice a week were virtually identical (if anything it slightly favored working out once a week). In fact, they pretty much did better than all the other frequency groups except for the five times a week group. Again, those who go to the gym Monday through Friday probably take other health factors more seriously and thus the better results. I should also point out that CVD mortality rates were the worst in people who worked out seven times a week or more. Give your heart a rest.

Now to the subject of headline science, there are a lot of well-known magazines citing this study (at least on their online articles) saying you can work out just once or twice a week, but they claim that there is a

catch. And that catch is supposedly that you have to meet the WHO's guideline of 150 min/week of moderate exercise or 75 min/week of vigorous exercise.

No. It does not say that.

Like I mentioned before, *all* groups almost equally decreased their chance of death, whether they met WHO's guidelines or not.

This is what it said: "One of the most striking findings in the present study was that 1 or 2 sessions per week of moderate or vigorous-intensity leisure time physical activity was sufficient to reduce all-cause, CVD, and cancer mortality risks **regardless** of adherence to prevailing physical activity guidelines." (emphasis mine)

Keep in mind, 60 minutes was the average amount of working out the insufficient activity group did with about 25 minutes of that being vigorous (and that matches the ideal range of less than 50 minutes and less than 500 MET-minutes in our jogging study). That puts it *well below* the guidelines of 150 minutes and 75 minutes for moderate and vigorous exercise, respectively.

Furthermore, eTable 8 made a final adjustment for survey years. (If they believe a survey year had a high error rate for whatever reason, they would give it less of a weight). After that final adjustment, the insufficient activity group did *better* than weekend warriors (people meeting WHO's guidelines) for all-cause mortality, CVD mortality, and cancer mortality rates.

Finally, and this gets so interesting that I wanted to include the table, when you break out the insufficient activity group into 1 or 2 sessions and 3 or more sessions, (as they did in Table 4 of the study) the insufficient group doing only 1 or 2 sessions beats the weekend warriors so much so that it is almost on par with the regularly active group when it comes to total mortality. There is only a difference of 1% point.

Table 4. Cox Proportional Hazards Regression for Associations Between Physical Activity Pattern and Mortality, Distinguishing Between the Insufficiently Active Groups<sup>a</sup>

Physical Activity Pattern <sup>b</sup>	No.	Mortality, HR (95% CI)		
		All-Cause	CVD	Cancer
Events		8802	2780	2526
Inactive	39 947	1 [Reference]	1 [Reference]	1 [Reference]
Insufficiently active, 1 or 2 sessions	11 067	0.66 (0.62-0.72)	0.60 (0.52-0.69)	0.83 (0.73-0.94)
Insufficiently active, ≥3 sessions	3157	0.82 (0.72-0.95)	0.79 (0.60-1.01)	0.99 (0.79-1.24)
Weekend warrior	2341	0.70 (0.60-0.82)	0.60 (0.45-0.82)	0.82 (0.63-1.06)
Regularly active	7079	0.65 (0.58-0.73)	0.59 (0.48-0.73)	0.79 (0.66-0.94)

Abbreviations: CVD, cardiovascular disease; HR, hazard ratio.

<sup>a</sup> Models adjusted for age, sex, smoking, occupation, and long-standing illness.

<sup>b</sup> Physical activity patterns were defined as follows: inactive, not reporting any moderate- or vigorous-intensity physical activities; insufficiently active, reporting less than 150 min/wk in moderate-intensity and less than 75 min/wk

in vigorous-intensity activities; weekend warrior, reporting at least 150 min/wk in moderate-intensity or at least 75 min/wk in vigorous-intensity activities from 1 or 2 sessions; and regularly active, reporting at least 150 min/wk in moderate-intensity or at least 75 min/wk in vigorous-intensity activities from 3 or more sessions.

I want you to take note of the cancer mortality rate for the insufficient activity group doing ≥3 sessions. It is virtually equal to the inactive group. How is that possible? I believe this is probably the group of people who go to the gym three times a week and only go through the motions. That would suggest that if you want the cancer-fighting properties of working out, you need *intensity*. Keep in mind the weekend warriors got 94% of their exercise through sports. And sports are basically as intense as you can get. You're basically going all out. The insufficient 1 to 2 session activity group probably had a similar percentage number (i.e. they also got their exercise from sports). The regular activity group had 75% of their members getting some of their workout from sports. And the other 25% is probably the gym nuts who don't mess around when they get there (they do high-intensity exercises).

(I want to say that this is some great reporting done by this study. Remember my main complaint against that large pro-sodium study, that they didn't break out the anomaly? Here, there really wasn't an anomaly on the surface, but they kept breaking down the data (even giving additional tables online) which let them make amazing discoveries with it and helps with my analysis. The jogging study also did a good job breaking out the data. If you ever become a researcher, these are the standards you want to aim for when it comes to writing your reports.)

That's it. You only need to work out once or twice a week. And it doesn't have to be the gym. You can play a sport, hike a mountain, canoe a river, or whatever. Just do something that gets your heart going. But if you do

go to the gym, make it a social activity. Remember, being with friends is one of the easiest ways to get healthy and feel good. Don't go to the gym alone.

And don't worry about overdoing it and trying to stay away from the weekend warrior category. The weekend warriors in the study averaged about 300 minutes a week. If you spend 4 hours hiking a mountain, that's only 240 minutes. Now if you hike a mountain every week, then you might be overdoing it. Just go for variety. And the best way to do that is to schedule something that sounds like fun, not work. Go for a fun bike ride around the neighborhood. It doesn't have to be hard.

But you *do* need to make sure you do something *each* week. Write it down in your schedule and plan it ahead of time with your friends.

*I don't know. Do I really not need to lift weights?*

Probably the only group that should do weight-bearing exercises for sure are the elderly as it can build mineral density of the bones and help prevent osteoporosis. But lifting weights isn't the only weight-bearing exercise out there. Jumping rope[210] and jogging[211] has been shown to build up the mineral density of the bones. There are a lot of weight-bearing exercises that are a lot more entertaining than mindlessly lifting weights at the gym. Or you could just buy some dumbbells at home to lift for a few minutes each day.

But besides that, you just need to be physical on the weekends. I think a new workout guide, based off these studies, should be 30-45 minutes of vigorous exercise (where you have moments where you are trying to catch your breath, like a sport where you run), or 1-1.5 hours of exercise where you breathe hard from time to time (like hiking a mountain with a gradual incline). Sure, I'm probably erroring on more than what the studies suggest, but at least the numbers *are* grounded in the studies. And if you go over or under at times, that's not a big deal as it'll all average out. *The important thing is that you get out there each weekend.*

Isn't it all kind of beautiful? I mean the world's healthiest diet is one that doesn't involve hurting animals. The world's best workout (at least the

most bang for the buck workout) is one where you can have fun with your friends on the weekend.

It's basically 30 minutes of working out instead of 7 hours! (The regular activity group was about 450 minutes or about an hour each day...) And you'll get the same results.

*Wait, won't I get injured if I'm a weekend warrior?*

Well, if you're playing a sport, for certain there is a chance of injury. But most acute injuries (like a rolled ankle or pulled tendon) tend to heal just fine if you give them time to heal and range of motion (you are giving it 5-6 days at least with this schedule). Chronic injuries (ones that build up over time) are the ones that never heal properly. That's because you are constantly deforming the tissue while it is trying to heal by putting weight on it. So if you're working out several times a week, you're greatly increasing your chance of chronic injuries. And major acute injuries (like a ruptured Achilles tendon) usually come from a chronic injury that has been getting worse with time. Or they come from physical contact sports. So full-contact football would be a bad sport to play if you are doing it for health benefits. Probably the same for, and I hate to say this as I love the sport, basketball as there is a lot of aggressive body contact involved. But touch football is probably a great sport to play as well as baseball, softball, tennis, and racquetball.

If injuries really scare you, then don't play sports. There are plenty of other activities that will get your heart rate up, like hiking, cycling, and jogging. And you can still go to the gym (just do it on the weekends, make it short and intense, and go with your friends). Don't worry too much about injuring yourself. The only studies I could find that talked about the dangers of being a weekend warrior had an unusual definition. Either they talked about extreme sports (like motocross, rock climbing, skateboarding, hockey, or air- or watercraft related activities)[212] or they are talked about people who did roof or tree maintenance at home on the weekend.[213] It's silly. And it's this weekend warrior fear that probably caused so many people to waste their lives in the gym in the first place. You don't need to live at the gym to be healthy. You don't need to worship the gym anymore. It's a form of vanity if you think about it.

*Yeah, but I want to lose weight and look good in a swimsuit...*

I think we can all relate to that. Yes, exercising more will burn more calories and can lead to weight loss (but you're also increasing your chance of chronic injury). However, it's a lot easier to just eat less calories. A typical Snickers candy bar (1.5 ounces) has over 200 calories. To burn that you would have to jog for 20 minutes. Or just don't eat the candy bar... Keep in mind, vegetables are the least caloric dense food out there. So they'll fill you up without adding to your weight.

Exercise should be for health and fun, not vanity.

The main point is you can just focus on having a life and having a fun, physically active, adventure with friends every weekend. You'll live just as long and be just as healthy as those fitness nuts. And, if anything, you'll be a lot happier. Isn't that great?

But there is one last thing I have to say: you're still wrong about working out...



# You're Still Wrong About Working Out

So if you do something physical on the weekend, you'll be fine, right?

Well, it isn't that simple.

Here's where it all falls apart, exercise and being active are two separate things that *independently* affect your health.

In other words, you can't sit on your butt all day and expect working out, even if you work out a lot, to negate all the sitting you do all day long.

To prove this, we'll be looking at a few different studies.[214][215][216]

*I noticed the first study said only women, not really men, were affected. Even then, it was mostly just for cancer. What is going on?*

I picked these three studies as I noticed there was one saying, besides all-cause and cancer mortality for women, there wasn't a trend to be found. Instead of ignoring it, I thought I would include it with the others. By comparing the three studies, I think we can easily see that there *is* a trend and why the first one might have said that.

First, let's compare the sample sizes. In order, we have 5,788 men, 7,744 men, and 53,440 men for each study. For deaths and in order, we had 139 die from CVD, 377 die from CVD, and 11,307 die from CVD for each study. So since the first study had the smallest sample size we're less likely to see trends in it clearly.

It reminds me very much of the processed meat versus red meat argument. Both of them harm the body, but process meat is worse. Thus, with a small or poorly designed study it could *appear* that only processed meat does harm. It looks like it was just small enough to keep certain trends from emerging clearly.

And the second study has more than twice as many of deaths to analyze and it looked *specifically* at men and cardiovascular death. They found

that excessive sitting gave a 60-80% higher risk of dying. Their definition of excessive sitting isn't high. It consisted of more than 10 hours driving or 23 hours or more of inactive behavior per week (that includes watching your TV or being on your computer). If you have an office job, well, you're out of luck.

However, and even more important, there was a clear trend line showing that *more* sitting meant *more* death, *regardless* of being physically active or not. (Physical activity did help to lessen the trend, as did having a lower BMI, and not having hypertension—avoid the sodium.)

However, regardless of your good health, anything greater than 7 hours in the week (1 hour per day) of driving your car or watching TV started to increase mortality rates (i.e. those two activities *combined* should be below 7 hours for the week or less than 1 hour a day).

Here is another difference in the studies.

The first study looked at sitting at work. The second study looked at time spent watching TV or riding a car. The third study looked at sitting at home.

However, the first study didn't group the data as well as the second and third study. First, for jobs where you don't sit down (manual labor, not office jobs), people tend to be healthier in general. The study even said: "[W]omen and men with standing/walking occupations were older, more likely to smoke, be of a lower education level and social class and have poorer health [...]" So they never really looked at how *much* someone walked or sat, but whether the job was an office one or manual labor one. And we know the culture of many manual labor jobs tend to be unhealthy ones. So if the multivariable adjustment doesn't adequately account for these factors, you won't have good results. I hate to say this, but the first study seems to be not only a small sample size but a poorly designed study as they don't break out the data. They just keep it in more or less two groups, sitting occupations and standing/walking occupations. Plus, standing doesn't have the same benefits as walking.

While I understand the more studies the better and that they probably couldn't break out the numbers anymore given the data, I still can't help

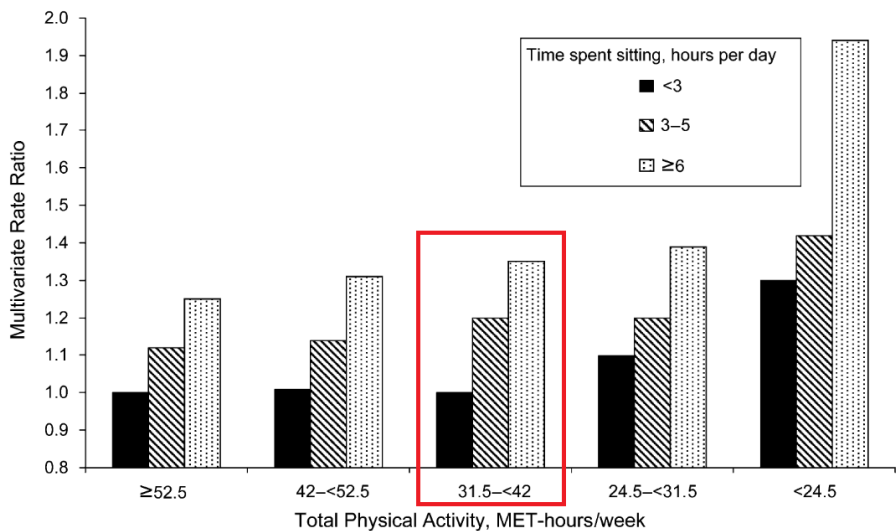
but be upset knowing that a news article might run a dumb headline saying sitting doesn't matter if you're a guy. It simply isn't true. You need further analysis. Consider for this study that women who had a non-sitting job with high physical activity saw a 50% and 60% decrease in their all-cause and cancer mortality, respectively. Plus, think about sitting jobs for men versus sitting jobs for women, at least in this current time and for the age of the people in the study. 50 years old was the average. Most women of that age in the office would be doing secretary work where they are glued to their computer working on documents. Most men with an office job at that age would walk around a lot more. They get up to talk to a coworker, they go to a meeting, meet a client for lunch, etc. They are a lot more physically active. Now think of a male physical labor job at that age. They drink and smoke more and they are exposed to more industrial chemicals. This would explain the much higher cancer mortality rate for men with a standing/walking job especially when it had low physical activity.

But for further analysis, let's look at the biggest and last study of the three as it looks at total mortality and does a better job breaking out the data. This study also saw an increase in cancer mortality rates for women who sat too much, but not for men. So it agrees with what was found in the small study (even though the small study pulled its data from the United Kingdom and this one from America). Everything is linking together.

(If you're wondering about the high cancer rates for women, while it didn't talk about what cancers caused the deaths, it probably has to do with sunlight. You have non-melanoma (basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma) and melanoma skin cancers. While UV light is the main cause of non-melanoma skin cancer it has virtually a 100% survival rate as it doesn't tend to spread through the body (they can just cut it out). Melanoma, however, is the deadly form of skin cancer. While it too can be caused by UV light, you can get melanoma *without* sunlight exposure. Actually, sunlight exposure has been associated with a *decrease* in the rate of death from melanoma.[217][218] Furthermore, it appears that the increase in melanoma rates from sunlight only comes from intense sessions.[219] In other words, *never* let yourself get sunburned. Again, since women tend to work inside and men outside, it might explain the

differences in cancer mortality rates. Personally, I know of a woman who was an office worker who actively tried to avoid the sun, and she ended up dying of skin cancer. There's a reason why your parents always told you to get some fresh air and sunshine when you were spending too much time inside.)

Here is a chart from the third study I think you'll find interesting.



So this is the all-cause mortality rate (lower is better) against MET-hours/week (activity level) with the bars broken out by hours spent sitting per day. If you convert it to MET-minutes you get a range of  $>3150$  to  $<1470$  MET-minutes/week. If you recall, our jogging study had a range of  $>1840$  to  $<500$  MET-minutes/week. What is going on here? Well, the jogging study was looking at working out, but this study is looking at *all* physical activity. You add to your MET-minutes even when you sleep. When it comes to being active, obviously more is better, but even brisk walking whenever you can plus physical activity you normally do in a week will give about 1500 MET-minutes. From there you can add your 500 MET-minutes from working out on the weekend you'll end up being in that middle range of 31.5-42 MET-hours/week (1890-2520 MET-minutes/week). From there, the best way to reduce your mortality rate is

to reduce how much time you sit. (Plus, if you aren't sitting, you'll naturally have to do something with a higher MET rating thus adding to your total for the week. Remember, sitting includes sitting on the computer at home, watching TV, or driving your car. We sit a lot more than you think.)

If you want to jump up to that >52.5 MET-hours/week group, you would have to add something like 2 hours of jogging per week (another 1200 MET-minutes). Even then, someone sitting less than you would have a significantly lower mortality rate.

Sitting is the new smoking.

(I should note that the graph above is actually from the women's data. Unfortunately, they didn't have a combined one. As much as I like for them to break out the data, it also needs to be combined at times. The men's followed the same trend, but the women's graph was the cleanest. I don't think the men accurately reported their activity levels as they probably under- or overestimate all the house and yard work they actually do and heavy lifting to help others. I think the situation is very similar to what we saw with the Kitava from Papua New Guinea. Same diet, but the men did more physical labor and were out in the sun more so they had better health markers. Furthermore, this sitting study also said half of the men worked but only a fifth of the women worked. But they did not have data on their occupation activity or occupation sitting practices, so we don't know how it affected the study. Remember how the results from the first sitting study looking at men's occupations were so unusual, but the second sitting study showed a clear trend for men with sitting and death outside of work? I think we're better off using the women's data here for everyone.)

The study mentioned that this was an older population, so the physical activity they got consisted of walking and gardening. Again, there is a difference between being active and exercising. And being active seems to be the most important thing. Do a dance class. Walk the neighborhood with a friend. Go to that music event. Go shopping at a mall. Do something where you are moving, not sitting. Per the study, try not to sit for more than 3 hours in a day.

If you have to sit at an office chair for hours, take a walking break whenever you can. While the studies never looked at total hours sitting versus total hours of *consecutive* sitting, walking has been shown to activate enzymes in the legs to break down fats and atherosclerosis plaque which might help with health issues. Plus, the calves are known as the second heart as they help to pump the blood up from your feet to your heart as you walk. So a walking break might take some strain off your heart and add years to your life.

If you commute for over an hour to work, it's probably time to move closer or get another job. Plenty of studies show it is the easiest way to improve your happiness (getting a shorter commute to work) or, even better, find a way to walk or take a bike to work.

Hopefully, it's clear to you that working out isn't enough. You need to decrease your sitting/sedentary activities and find ways to be more active in life.

Remember, based off all the studies, no more than 3 hours a day sitting should be your goal (that includes watching TV).

Finally, the studies kept stating that those who sat less were leaner. You did want to look good in that swimsuit, didn't you?

# The Four Pillars of Health

Let's summarize the four pillars of health.

**Nutrition** – Eat only whole foods (vegan). And eat a variety of whole foods. Add starchy foods (like potatoes, beans, rice, etc.) to make sure you get all your minerals and proteins. No salt. No oil. If you do eat processed foods, try to eat low-sodium and low saturated fat items. Only supplement B12 and maybe vitamin D.

**Sleep** – Sleep until you feel rested. Try to wake up with the sun and go to sleep at the same time each day. Take a 10-15 minute nap in the middle of the day when possible.

**Exercise** – You need to exercise *and* be active. Try not to sit more than 3 hours a day (this includes driving and watching TV). Try to take short walking breaks at work whenever you can. Get about 30-45 minutes of vigorous exercise (you should have moments where you are gasping for air) or 1-1.5 hours of moderate exercise (you should have moments where you breathe hard) once a week. Save your workout for the weekend. Make it fun!

**Social** – Arrange your living situation where you are sharing your residency with a friend or where they live next door to you. Do more social activities with friends. Don't go to the gym alone.

Let's talk about the medical community (which would be the fifth pillar). I didn't talk about it before because it really comes down to you using your head. Why? Well, doctors are one of the leading causes of death. So people are often quick to say that they shouldn't be trusted. But Steve Jobs would probably still be here if he had taken his doctor's advice (his type of pancreatic cancer was easily treatable in the early stages, but he decided on a more natural path). But, then again, I had a grandma who died because she would take any medicine a doctor would prescribe and it caused her liver to fail. But there are certainly people who have also died because of herbal supplements they were taking. All I can say is to use your critical thinking skills when it comes to any type of treatment.





# Guides

Always consult your doctor before you change what you eat.

Here is an easy food guide, shopping guide, to-do list, and supplement guide to use for your first week. I'm sure you'll figure out everything else from there.

# **Food Guide**

Just remember to eat your oats, greens, and beans every day. Feel free to add other plant foods to boost their nutritional value but avoid adding salt.

## **Breakfast**

- ☐ Oatmeal with berries and flaxseeds

## **Lunch**

- ☐ Mixed greens with nuts

## **Dinner**

- ☐ Beans and rice or potatoes

## **Snacks**

- ☐ Mixed frozen vegetables
- ☐ Air-popped popcorn
- ☐ Various fruits

## **Drinks**

- ☐ Tap water (add some lemon juice and drink through a straw)
- ☐ Coffee (avoid if pregnant, breastfeeding, or a child, no more than 4 cups a day)
- ☐ Soymilk or other plant milks
- ☐ Green tea, peppermint tea, and hibiscus tea
- ☐ Hot chocolate (no sugar)

# **Shopping Guide**

## **Breakfast**

- ☐ Oatmeal
- ☐ Mixed frozen berries
- ☐ Flaxseed

## **Lunch**

- ☐ Mixed leafy greens
- ☐ Organic carrots
- ☐ Celery
- ☐ Beets
- ☐ Walnuts
- ☐ Almonds
- ☐ Sunflower seeds (no salt)
- ☐ Cranberries
- ☐ Raisins

## **Dinner**

- ☐ Brown rice, dry
- ☐ Brown rice, microwavable
- ☐ Beans, dry (various)
- ☐ Beans, canned (various, low-sodium)
- ☐ Condiments - like salsa, hot sauce, ketchup, pepper, herb mix (low/no-sodium)
- ☐ Potatoes
- ☐ Sweet Potatoes

## **Snacks and Misc.**

- ☐ Lemons and straws
- ☐ Popcorn for air popping
- ☐ Frozen vegetables (various)

- ☐ Fresh fruit
- ☐ B12 supplement
- ☐ Vitamin D
- ☐ Coffee grounds
- ☐ Paper coffee filters
- ☐ Iodized salt

## **To-Do List**

- ☐ Take B12 (and possibly vitamin D) daily
- ☐ Squeeze lemon wedges into drinking water
- ☐ Sign up for and use Cron-o-Meter for a week
- ☐ Get your cholesterol levels tested
- ☐ Look up tasty vegan recipes online
- ☐ No cooking oils or dressings
- ☐ Donate blood twice a year
- ☐ Take frequent walking breaks during work
- ☐ Stay under 1,000 mg of sodium (unless you sweat a lot)
- ☐ Be more active and have more physical fun on the weekends (get more fresh air and sunshine with your friends)

## **Supplement Guide**

- ☐ Pregnant and breastfeeding women - Prenatal vitamin (read the label for 150 mcg of iodine) or one serving (10 grams) of roasted seaweed (nori)
- ☐ Athletes in the hot sun – DIY sports drink (only drink *after* sweating):
  - ¼ teaspoon of iodized salt
  - ¾ teaspoon of kosher or sea salt
  - 8 sugar cubes (8 teaspoons)
  - 32 ounces (4 cups) of water
  - Splash or up to ½ cup of coconut water
  - Squeezed lemons and limes or hibiscus petals
- ☐ People who work out but don't sweat a lot – no need for a salty sports drink. Just eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- ☐ B12
- ☐ Vitamin D
- ☐ *Optional* - Vegan protein shake
- ☐ *Optional* - Algae-based omega-3

# Further Reading

Guess what? There are even more reasons to avoid animal products!

[Nutritionfacts.org](http://Nutritionfacts.org) - If you enjoy finding out interesting health facts, this should be your number one site. Dr. Greger does an awesome job of researching the newest studies and linking it all together.

[DrEsselstyn.com](http://DrEsselstyn.com) - All these years and Dr. Esselstyn is still at it. See what he has been up to on his website. You might be able to catch him at one of his speaking events.

[VeganHealth.org](http://VeganHealth.org) - Looking for more information on eating a proper vegan diet? This site is a great resource. The site is maintained by Jack Norris RD.

[PlantPositive.com](http://PlantPositive.com) - If you really want to see some deep analysis of studies, check out Plant Positive. The author of this site has decided to stay anonymous.

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Finally, thank you for reading this book. Please consider giving it or copies of it to the people you care about. It might just save their lives.

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The Case Against Television (Should We Have No TVs in our Homes?)

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### **Abstract**

Should one remove the televisions from their house? All the evidence seems to point to yes. After reviewing several studies, they show that not only does it cause depression, aggression, and antisocial behaviors, as well as structural changes to the brain, but it prevents happiness. Adults who as children did not have a television growing up report that they do not enjoy watching it. And adults who suddenly removed all the televisions from their homes report not missing it and same for the children who were forced to give it up. Furthermore, the vast majority of humankind was without television yet there are no reports of social or chronic boredom, depression, or unhappiness. They might have been happier as they were forced to socialize more. News, weather, and information in general can be more effectively and efficiently acquired through the internet. However, one must be cautious that the new internet video services and smartphones don't become their new TVs. In an effort to "cut the cord," what seems like the most logical and successful method, and contrary to the often "it is all about moderation" or to just reduce your viewing time, is to remove all televisions from your house. Like smoking cigarettes, it is probably best if you just stop altogether and not give yourself easy access to your vice. If you really want or need to watch a television program, it is best to watch it at a friend's house as socializing protects against depression and is also what provides the most happiness.

*Keywords:* Television, child development, aggression, depression, happiness, antisocial behavior, smartphone addiction, internet addiction

### **Main Body**

Removing the television from the home seems like a radical, even a taboo subject. Sure, we are told over and over again by people, even those on the television itself, that TV is bad for you, that you should go get some fresh air. And with the Internet, there is no need for the TV anymore when it comes to information. Yet, after that message, we are told to just take a break from TV once in a while. We are also told over and over that cigarettes are bad for you, but what if you were then given a “just take a break from smoking once in a while” or “it’s all about moderation” message?

The TV situation seems similar to meat consumption advice. Over and over, once again even by the television, we are told that meat, especially red meat, is bad for you. We even joke about this certain knowledge by having a burger serving restaurant called the “Heart Attack Grill.” And we know about the cancer-causing chemicals created while cooking meat. Yet, the message is then backed up by an “it’s all about moderation” one. Or eat what feels good to you. (Wouldn’t cocaine or cigarettes also make one feel good?) However, a diet without animal products (vegan) is clearly the world’s healthiest diet (Aiken, 2017). The science is overwhelming. This doesn’t mean everyone should be forced to be vegan; however, everyone should at least know the truth instead of given the moderation message.

However, similar to the cigarette industry, the television industry wouldn’t want you to stop using their products or even reduce consumption. Perhaps by being the ones to tell you the message of television being harmful, they think you won’t see the television and the industry being so bad and keep watching. After all, if they don’t tell you that or tried to deny the harm it does, then they would look like the bad guys trying to get you to watch more. I guess they learned from the smoking industry of not denying the truth or else society will eventually and suddenly turn against you. We have a very strong campaign against smoking in America, but not so much for television watching (though they say sitting is the new smoking). Even the Paleo community will directly tell you the harms of eating meat, but then

later give “scientific” claims that it is nothing to worry about. Then they say the vegan community cherry picks studies or that correlation isn’t causation. But by taking a closer look, it is clear they are the ones cherry picking studies (looking at a study or a few that contradicts *all* the other studies out there), claim correlation isn’t causation to attack a anti-meat study (even when the cause and effect is clear in the design of such studies, i.e. an experimental study), or use headline science (looking at the headline of a study or article to draw their conclusions without actually *reading* and analyzing what it says) (Aiken, 2017).

Yet, unlike the Paleo community, the television industry doesn’t play the same game of telling you the harms of television and *then* try to deny or confuse the watchers about it. Why? Perhaps, they know just how addicted and hooked the population is when it comes to television. While there are many things to eat, there is only one television to watch. No need to confuse them. Just don’t flat out deny the truth, and they’ll be back. While that would be disturbing if true, is being addicted to the television even a real concern?

Is TV bad for you? Of course, television itself even agrees. However, I will explore just how bad it is for you and whether you should remove it from your family’s home entirely.

### **How Bad is Television?**

So how bad is television for you?

An article originally published in *U.S. News & World Report* (Schroeder, 2015) looking at studies showed a delay in language development and advised that parents should “not have the television or use television [and] movies routinely to entertain children under age 2.” They also found increased aggression in children. “The relationship between violent media use and aggression and desensitization

to violence is as strong as or stronger than the relationship between smoking and lung cancer.” It said studies also showed feelings of loneliness and depression are linked to watching television. Some experts said increased use of electronics in general can further isolate individuals or promote antisocial behavior (Schroeder, 2015).

This article seems to highlight the common themes with television watching: increased aggression, depression, and feelings of loneliness. However, television watching also seems to harm intelligence, even to the point of changing structures in the brain.

*LiveScience* (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2015) looked at studies and found that more than 3 hours of TV a day destroyed cognitive performance which included the “speed at which they processed information, their verbal memory and executive function”. Physical activity seems to have the opposite effect. TV really does appear to rot the brain. Physical changes in the brain were noted in the article like thickening of the hypothalamus from watching television which is linked to increased aggression. And it noted other studies showed that the likelihood of depression, being convicted of a crime, and type 2 diabetes (probably from all that sitting) increased with each additional hour of TV watched during the day.

An article in *Scientific American* (Fields, 2016) looked at studies in Japan that showed physical changes in the brain (specifically, the size of different parts of the brain) that usually results in lower language-based reasoning ability in children. These changes happened regardless of the gender or the age the child started watching TV. The actual lowering of IQ from watching television was confirmed using language IQ tests. The more television watched, the lower the score. (The good news is that the structure and size of different parts of the brain can still change even when older (Moustafa, 2013).) Fields brings up the excellent point that it might not be the TV that rots your brain but that it robs you of doing something more productive and challenging to your brain with your time. So it might be the opportunity cost that is so damaging.

I don't believe it is so much that you could have done something a lot more beneficial to your brain (like reading or writing) with your time, but rather watching television is such an unnaturally *passive* activity that it prevents normal brain development. In other words, almost *anything* is a better use of your brain than watching TV. Since, as noted in the article, we see that the visual parts of the brain are also enhanced/enlarged with increased television watching, we know television, by itself, can cause changes to the brain. We also know that using an area of the brain will cause it to grow and mature, but the opposite is also true. So if you give in to anger, the more of an angry person you become (Spiegel, 2009). But the *less* you give in to anger, the less of an angry person you become. It's the use it or lose it principle with the brain. Since television is a passive activity (you don't have to think for yourself), you aren't using the reasoning part of your brain, so it only makes sense that it would atrophy. Of course, the children who spent their time working on writing assignments rather than some other activity that didn't involve TV would be in an even better position with their language skills. Think about it, very few activities outside of television don't require reasoning. Even when you are sitting in silence you are often reflecting on and thinking about your life.

Another example of change in the brain could come from mirror neurons. They make you simulate in your brain the actions you see. Mirror neurons have even been found in the emotional parts of the brain (Ferrari & Rizzolatti, 2014). Thus, they can even cause you to feel the same feelings as the person you are watching. So when the main hero who we identify with in a TV program shows his anger by punching the bad guy in the face it makes that area of the brain grow and become stronger/more dominate. Since we know the more violent you are the more violent you become, with mirror neurons the more violence you watch the more violent you become. Perhaps, the "hear no evil, see no evil" proverb is one to be taken seriously. And with opportunity cost, it might be even worse as the reasoning areas of the brain are what help to keep emotions, like anger, in check. And this would help to explain

why children in particular, whose prefrontal cortex are still developing (which is where this regulation is found), become so violent with TV.

Let's now look at some primary sources in regards to television watching. (While I try not to rely on secondary sources (even if they cite primary sources), unlike the meat promoting industry, there doesn't seem to be any obfuscation of the truth. (There are a lot of people out there who only make money if you choose to eat animal products.) As I mentioned before, the television industry doesn't try to make any effort to deny the harms of television watching. They know chances are you'll never beat this addiction *even* with good information. Still, let's check primary sources to make sure they agree with our articles mentioned.)

Going all the way back to 1986 (Liebert), the academic literature seemed to be in agreement that television caused the development of aggression in children and reinforced materialistic attitudes. Restricting viewing and talking about what they saw helps to negate those effects.

Besides Japan, Egypt (El-Houfey & Elserogy, 2013) saw that an increase in television watched was met with an increase in violence for children. Increasing school activities and socializing showed to decrease violence.

While there is no formal definition of television addiction, individuals who see themselves as addicted (who tend to watch television twice as much as normal) are unhappy watching television and seem powerless to stop themselves (Charankumer, 2015). That's disturbing. It seems like television can become a black hole of unhappiness, a negative feedback loop. (A negative feedback loop essentially keeps you where you are. You're unhappy so you watch television, but television keeps you unhappy and keeps you watching television.) Sure, most people probably turn to television for fun or to help with a bad day, but, like a drug, it seems to have the potential to hook their audience even when it doesn't give the desired pleasure.

Furthermore, it seems like the more negative a person feels, the more likely they'll binge watch television the next day (Bayraktaroglu, Gunaydin, Selcuk, & Ong, 2018). (They also found the more positive someone feels the prior day predicts a decrease in how much TV they'll watch the next.) This was true even after controlling for age (they looked at 30- to 80-year olds), gender, income, employment status, marital status, health status, and personal traits. While television itself doesn't necessarily make you feel bad (as noted by the study), when you consider the other study above, if someone is having a bad day, they might start to binge watch their life away.

(Please note, this study only looked at people for 8 days. They were even given short phone interviews for each of those days. Socializing (even with weak ties like the interviewers) and novelty increase happiness and, thus, the interviewing might negate some of the bad effects of TV watching (Sandstrom & Dunn, (2014); Buchanan & Bardi, 2010). (So you might want to consider having a friendly conversation with your cashier next time instead of treating it like a formal exchange. Acts of kindness also tend to increase happiness as much as novelty.) Bayraktaroglu's study itself notes that watching television *with someone* is more likely to increase your happiness rather than watching it alone. We're social creatures. So to say that TV doesn't cause depression or unhappiness, when all the other studies seem to link to it, would be a bit of stretch. Perhaps not in the short-term, but it looks like it does in the long-term. And, at the very least, the television keeps depressed people depressed.)

Is there cause and effect between depression and television watching? If the changes in the brain don't convince you maybe this will. While we would love to have an experimental study (lock people up so all variables are controlled for other than television watching, but that seems rather inhuman) no such study exists that I'm aware of. However, Nott (2013) looked at three difference observational studies that support cause and effect. One is a longitudinal study (they follow people over time so it goes more to the cause and effect than a snapshot in time) that followed people for 30 years.



More television meant more depression. And the happiest people watched less than two hours a day and socialized the most. And we know socializing is a driver of happiness. (Again, we are social creatures.) Thus, this would suggest television watching itself is a driver of depression. Another study appeared to be a cross-sectional study (a snapshot in time) of 4,000 Scotland residents. While cross-sectional is far from being experimental, this study showed that exercise had no effect on the strong link between depression and the amount of television consumed. Seeing that exercise is one of the most powerful ways to treat depression, it would suggest that television is a very strong *driver* when it comes to depression (enough to overcome the benefits of exercise) and is not just correlated. (While one could argue they suffered from depression and thus watched TV, it is very unlikely that all of them decided to treat their depression by watching TV *and* had the type of depression where exercise couldn't help. Most likely, TV watching was overriding the benefits of exercise.) Another longitudinal study looking at 50,000 women for 14 years showed that more television meant more depression. This study also looked at physical activity (PA) and television levels. It suggested that "[a]nalyzes simultaneously considering PA and television watching suggested that both contributed *independently* to depression risk." Just how exercise is a driver that decreases depression, the study suggests that TV watching to be a driver that increases depression.

(For those with depression and want help, besides my advice of going to a professional about it, exercise is one of the best ways to treat it. But which exercise is best when it comes to mental health? In a study reported on by *The Wall Street Journal*, doing team sports did the best followed by cycling (Reddy, 2018). It seems like being physical *and* social is the best way to go about it. Jogging came in fourth. But I bet if they only looked at people who jogged in a group, they would be up there with team sports. Cycling probably did so well because you are outside getting some fresh air and sunshine. And since getting people together for a game of basketball or to go jogging as an adult can be difficult, I would simply suggest you buy a bike and ride it around your neighborhood with your friends and family.

Finally, the article noted that between 30 to 60 minutes of activity does the best for mental health with 45 minutes being optimal.)

Does television watching *cause* depression? From the changes we see in the structure of the brain and all these different studies, at least in the long-term, the only reasonable answer is yes.

Not only does TV *cause* depression, it'll trap you. To complement Bayraktaroglu's study above in regard to age, let's examine one more study at the University of Texas at Austin. They looked at 300 adults from 18 to 29 years old. It showed that the more lonely and depressed you were, the more likely you were to binge watch television. Remember, television is a negative feedback loop, a depression black hole. Don't get sucked in. And your best bet is to get rid of the TV altogether. (With the TV gone, all you can really do is go be social for entertainment.) And the study also showed that watching television for more than 3 hours a day doubled the chance of all-cause mortality (Andrews, 2015). (This could be from the fact that simply sitting more than 3 hours a day has also been showed to double mortality (Aiken, 2017, pg. 108–13). Like I said, sitting is the new smoking.)

Like heroin or cocaine, TV seems to temporarily ease your pain only to hook you and cause more damage in the long-term. So what should we do when we are feeling blue?

Let's take a closer look at the study Nott found. The longitudinal study from the University of Maryland looking at 30,000 adults for over 30 years saw that televisions increased depression while social activities (and oddly enough reading the newspaper) increased happiness (Landen, n.d.).

It seems like being with friends is the answer when you are feeling blue, exercise (as we've talked about before), and, I guess, reading material that isn't on an electronic screen. As I'll keep saying in this article, we are social creatures.

When you consider that many people watch television while still unhappy and don't seem to be able to stop, it would suggest a hijacking of the reward system of the brain where dopamine is supplied. Dopamine isn't the reward part of the reward system of the brain, it is the addicting part. It makes sure you keep doing your activity hoping to get a reward (even when you don't). This overstimulation of the reward center of the brain will most likely make it grow, making it a more dominate structure in your brain and personality, and, thus, make you more addicted/crave other stimulating activities (like junk food, sex, etc.). Essentially, this overstimulation seems to be desensitizing that part of the brain. And I'll show later that this seems to be the case.

What about movies? Certainly the occasional movie wouldn't do much damage to our reward system or mental health. To answer that, I'm going to look at a seemingly unrelated study. It has been shown that daydreaming *decreases* happiness (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). It wasn't just correlated, but proven to *cause* unhappiness (even when daydreaming about good stuff). The study suggested that we should, instead, stay engaged with what is currently happening around us to be happier. However, given what we know about television watching and depression (and what I'll later show with internet and smartphone usage) not only should we avoid all screens but it seems like we need to be engaged with our *actual* reality to be happier. As such, I cannot recommend watching movies. Besides, after seeing a movie at the movie theater, don't you feel sort of empty inside (same when a TV series ends)?

For now, we can draw the conclusions from all the studies that there is a direct cause and effect link between television watched and depression, aggressive, loneliness, and lower intelligence. Television does indeed rot the brain. Furthermore, there seems to be a negative feedback loop. The more depressed and unhappy you are, the more likely you'll keep watching television, even though you don't want to. You are a junkie, no different than someone addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Most would give the advice to remove such intoxicating and addicting substances from the house. But can you live without television?

### **Could You Live Without Televisions?**

I think the first thing people would say is that they would be so bored without television. But is that true? Keep in mind it was only in 1965 that just about everyone had a television in their house (94%, today it is around 98%). While that seemed to have made it a normal part of human civilization, that is only just over 50 years that humankind has had a television in their houses (in 1950, it was about 10%) ("Television History – The First 75 Years," n.d.). If you start counting modern history from 1500, only 1/10 of our existence had television. If you count from the common era (1 A.C.E.), that is 2.5% of our history was with TV. If you count how old modern humans are per scientists (200,000 years), that is 0.025% of our evolution as the human species included television. Your brain simply isn't designed for TV (it can, however, be hijacked).

Sure, some people did suffer from boredom from time to time in the past. But from written evidence, boredom seemed to be the exception not the norm back then. Overall, they were happy (perhaps even happier) without television as they would have interacted with other people more and knew how to entertain themselves and, perhaps, others. So to say that one would be unhappy or bored without television is ignoring history.

Believe it or not, there are people who never had a television growing up in this modern age. While a very small minority, they seem to consist of both the far right (e.g. ultra-conservative Christians) and far left (e.g., and I don't know the politically correct term here, hippies). As far as the children who grew up without a television, most said they didn't miss it. The 10- to 13-year olds did feel left out when it came to pop culture (but that's a good thing isn't it?). However, when becoming 14 or 15 years old

“most had come full circle and said they didn't really like TV and didn't mind doing without” (Moskowitz, 2008). They also looked at people who decided later in life to give up television. For those who stopped watching, they didn't seem to report any downsides to giving up TV.

Another interesting thing, for the group that got rid of television, is that the children didn't bug parents for junk food or toys as often *after* getting the television out of the house. You would think it would be the exact opposite, but this seems to agree with the idea that the reward center of the brain is being overstimulated. In other words, with the TV gone that part of the brain starts to rewire and/or shrink. (Makes you wonder if the TV is to blame for a lot of society's ills, like drug abuse, obesity, porn addiction, internet addiction, gambling, etc.)

Finally, it noted that the children didn't complain about being bored. They found that they were *very* good at entertaining themselves when given the challenge.

If a child can live without a TV, so can you.

### **Are There any Benefits from Television?**

Are there benefits to television? I guess one could argue the educational aspects of some programs (though considering how TV seems to rot the brain, it is questionable if there is an overall benefit or harm). However...

Most of TV is garbage.

Sitcoms are about a cathartic release instead of fixing your life. The main character who is an overweight mom yells at the good looking and skinny neighbor character over nothing. Why? Because instead of accepting their bodies because they have no control over it (genetics) or improving their diet and activity level because they do have control of it (environment), the immature audience members

choose to live out their self-hatred and rage for not having the ideal body by tuning in to their favorite, hate-filled television character who they can relate to. While they can't yell at the people in their neighborhood in real life without consequence, they can watch dysfunctional television and continue to stay dysfunctional in their own lives.

The actual funny part of the sitcom is the "growing" moment at the end of most shows, yet they continue to stay in their dysfunctional world without changing themselves or their relationships for the better. The outer is a representation of the inner. If they were really growing as individuals, then their lives would change. But everything always returns back to how things were at the end of the episode. Watching TV for moral growth is like saying that candy is fruit flavored and thus it has the same health benefits of real fruit. You can't get healthy from eating candy. Beneficial change doesn't come from eating garbage food or watching garbage television, but from working on one's self. While a slow process, the opportunity cost of television keeps you from doing that. The television doesn't want you to grow; they just want you to *think* you are growing as a person because they know a mature person wouldn't watch television.

And all reality TV is fake, so it is really no different than the sitcom except for one strange fact: it seems the more we feel disconnected to people the more we want to watch "real" people to feel connected as there is a strong link between watching reality TV and voyeurism (not, necessarily, of the sexual type). This voyeuristic desire seems to be driven by the lack of companionship and connection to other people (Patrick, 2018). They don't want you to be social; they just want you to *feel* like you're being social so you'll keep sitting on your butt watching TV. So I don't think it's a mistake that one of the first reality TV shows was called "The Real World" when it's clearly not. Thus, watching reality TV means it is probably time to start engaging with *actual* reality. Once again, we are social creatures.

Furthermore, television seems to be becoming more and more extreme with time. Like pornography not comparing to actual sex, TV watching can't compare to actual socializing. Porn seems to be becoming more extreme as time goes on (and such extremes are becoming more and more normalize) trying to satisfy the viewer's desires that have become desensitized (Love, Laier, Brand, Hatch, & Hajela, 2015), but it never can as it'll never compare to real lovemaking. In the real world, you come across characters, and those differences cause people to interact in amusing, unique ways. Trying to give that same level of satisfaction to the viewers, the characters on television have to become more and more extreme. The television dad has become dumber and dumber to amuse people watching. The modern Homer Simpson is far less intelligent than the original one. Other animated cartoons continue to make the main character and often other characters unbelievably dumb or with extreme personality disorders. Besides lower intelligence, "The Simpsons" (I assume everyone who has a TV knows about the Simpsons) are an excellent example of this change, of things becoming more extreme.

While nudity was not accepted at first, "Naked and Afraid" (a show where contestants are dropped off in the wilderness to survive completely naked) shows everything except for a small blur on their privates and breasts (if female). Before that, the only people who could get away with a completely naked rear was the animated cartoon The Simpsons. And before that, it wouldn't even be dreamed of. (And why the desire to see a naked bottom on TV? Why not work to see one in real life? Seeing it on television is the easy way, an easy trap, and a poor substitute.) Currently, Netflix seems to be pushing the boundary even more by showing full frontal nudity in several animated sitcoms including one that stars children in middle school. Is there any limit or will boundaries of common decency continue to be broken for entertainment? Television programs are having more unusual situations, like talking animals, cursing, animated nudity, unusual sexual situations, and other unrealistic situations to entertain the masses.

A concerning aspect of all this unusual and bizarre situations from TV is the subconscious mind. The subconscious retains everything you give it. The subconscious is trying to figure things out (while the conscious brain avoids pain more than it pursues pleasure, the subconscious brain seems to seek pleasure/reward more so than it avoids pain). While your conscious brain might be smart enough to know it is only a cartoon, you're subconscious has no idea. So you are filling your subconscious brain with garbage. And your subconscious is trying to help you out in life. It is the one who gives you sudden epiphanies to your problems.

What garbage TV is doing to your subconscious is like what eating junk food does your body. You can't expect to have a healthy body from eating junk. And you can't expect to have a healthy mind from watching junk.

But what about the news? Most of the major news you can learn from other places, like the internet, radio, or those new talking devices in our homes. What about local news? I've never learned anything important to my life from the local news besides the weather and traffic, which I can get more accurately from the internet. And the televised news, in general, seems to worsen depression as "TV newscasts often intensify depressive moods" (Potts & Sanchez, 1993) and "they remained unchanged" after 15 minutes (Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007). Wouldn't you much rather get your weather without hearing about all the crime you'll probably never need to worry about in your lifetime? Not to mention that most of the commercials used to advertise the news use fearmongering over nothing. Do you really want to invite such people to your home? Don't make yourself depressed; don't watch the evening news.

Besides, has the news really done anything for you lately other than scare you? A lot of those stories reported are simply entertainment for your brain. You don't actually use that information. Maybe you hear about a celebrity dying. But that celebrity is a complete stranger to you. I'm not saying



you shouldn't care. What I'm saying is that you should care just as much as for a stranger you've never heard of in another country dying. Think about it, the only "interaction" you've had with that celebrity is from watching them on television.

When it comes to the news, remember that we had a study showing that happier people in it read the newspaper (even though it too probably had bad news). If you want to learn what is going on in your world, do the activity that will engage your brain, not the passive one or the one with a computer screen.

Even if you could argue for a good program to watch, there is one thing you can't control: the commercials. There is a reason why marketers spend millions if not billions on advertisements. The subconscious is clearly impressionable. Don't let them flood your head with garbage.

There really are no benefits to watching television.

### **Not Letting the Internet Become the New Television (or How Smartphones are the New Drug)**

The problem nowadays is that the computer has now become the new TV. Throw the TVs out of the house and people can still go online to see YouTube, NetFlix, Hulu, etc. Even cable companies and satellite companies allow you to log in at their website on your computer, smartphone, or tablet to access all the same channels you would have gotten from their TV service. That makes the current internet potentially worse than the TV. So what do the studies say about all of this?

While there doesn't seem to be any studies comparing internet TV versus normal TV in regards to harm, there is very interesting research looking into smartphones. Growth in smartphone usage came about pretty much with the release of the iPhone in 2007. Now just about everyone has a smartphone. But disturbingly Twenge (2017) found an unbelievable increase in depression, suicide, loneliness, and social

isolation with the generations growing up with these smartphones, unlike anything we have ever seen before. (She also found a causal link with social media use and depression.) The children also had less of a desire to become independent from their parents (they let their parents drive them where they wanted to go instead of getting a car of their own).

While this has nothing to do with watching TV on your phone or computer, you couldn't really do that until *after* the smartphone became a thing. But being able to watch TV on your phone gives you less of a reason to leave it and more of a reason to stay isolated. The internet before the smartphone didn't seem all that harmful to people. Netflix and YouTube might help explain the disturbing trend Twenge saw in her study. Regardless, the modern internet seems to isolate and, thus, harm people more than ever. And we already know how TV usage and isolation makes people depressed. Overall, we should know it isn't a good thing. (I would highly suggest you read Twenge's article when you get a chance. It is very eye-opening and will help you to rethink your relationship with your electronics. Besides television, an electronics detox might not be such a bad idea as long as you are also social during that time. The Screen-Free Week campaign is very popular among families. You can learn more at [screenfree.org](http://screenfree.org))

So how do we prevent the computer from becoming the new TV? Well, and this is really no different than not watching TV shows, don't watch things like YouTube or Netflix. There is little reason to believe that it isn't going to be just as bad for you as the television. While you probably can't get rid of the computer the same way you can with the TV, put your computer in a more public place in the house. Use it for communication and getting information, not for entertainment.

But how do we prevent the smartphone from becoming the new TV? That's a hard one. The smartphone is becoming a tool we use more and more often. While not necessary at this point in society, it could hold you back if you don't use one. The way I see it, smartphone use falls into three

categories. The first one, and I believe a small minority, are people who use it mostly for non-social activities, like games and YouTube. In this sense, it is no different than a computer and falls under general internet addiction. Those individuals might need to get rid of their smartphones and computer, or at least get them out of their rooms, until they can better control themselves. The second, and larger or largest group, are people who are actually hyper-social with it (Samuel & Moriah, 2018), which does, in a sense, create antisocial behavioral as they get less face-to-face interactions with people. The final and “healthy” group are the ones who use it as a tool to enhance their face-to-face relationships (e.g. they use it to find friends to go jogging with or stay current with people they see in person). If you are in the second group, you should focus on moving towards the third group. We crave social interaction. But it is best to fulfill that desire in more human like ways. In other words, “[p]ursuing healthy social connection is the antidote” (Samuel & Moriah, 2018).

But how to move from the second to the third group isn’t clear. Perhaps, simply knowing the harm that Twenge (2017) points out will be enough. But if it is a true addiction, it might not be. One successful treatment that works for internet addiction, like the first group, is Cognitive Behavior Therapy if given enough time (about 2-3 months). They said the success came from clients coming up with coping strategies and they were still free of their addiction 6 months later (Young, 2017). It wouldn’t be a stretch to believe that such therapy might work for smartphone addiction. They could still use their smartphone but find coping strategies to prevent overuse like turning off notifications to “help to ‘un-ring’ Pavlov’s proverbial bell” (Samuel & Moriah, 2018) so they aren’t getting a constant dopamine spike from these cues which will help them no longer be a slave to monitoring their online activities with their phone.

I can’t overstate how detrimental the modern Internet (social media, smartphones, etc.) has been for the new generation. Don’t let your internet become your new TV. Depression and suicide

aren't worth it. But if we can't use the computer for entertainment, what are we going to do when we get rid of all the TVs in the house?

### **Cutting the Cord**

Ready to cut your addiction?

Well, how should you go about it? Get rid of every TV in your house, of course. Sure, you could just cut back on watching, but I think that advice everyone gives is a bad one.

It's like eating animal products. Since we know they are bad (Aiken, 2017), we should just cut them out altogether. Keeping animal products around probably wouldn't be such a good idea since you've developed a taste for them when younger. Or it's like smoking. Sure, cutting down on them would be better, but just stop smoking instead. And you *definitely* wouldn't keep cigarettes in the house.

Speaking of cigarettes, there is a highly praised book that many said helped them to break the habit for good. It's called *Allen Carr's Easy Way to Stop Smoking*. Many said they didn't even have to finish the book to stop smoking. Considering how people complain about smoking being almost impossible to quit, it certainly gets your interest. What is so different about this book?

The book basically breaks down all your possible explanations for smoking and explains them away, whether it's to socialize, the calming effect, to be cool, or whatever. He's shifting you away from the reward/emotional part of the brain, to the controlling/logical part of the brain. Hopefully, I've already done a lot of that in regards to TV. But let's do it for sure this time.

Why do you watch television?

*Entertainment.* I want you to think of a moment that you really felt alive, I mean you felt amazing.

Chances are it didn't involve a TV. Actually, I bet some of the best nights of your life came from simply being with friends. So why not aim for those more enjoyable moments?

*Boredom.* I remember a teacher telling me that if you're bored it's because you're a boring person. And don't forget we're social creatures. If you're bored it's probably because you aren't spending time with people. They are only a phone call away. So if you want to be entertained, it is probably best to first be entertaining to others. Be an entertaining person, be someone others want to be around.

*News/Information.* Again, you can read the newspaper. Besides, hearing about something horrible that happened 100s or 1,000s of miles away isn't going to improve or affect your life anyway. If you need to know the weather, use the internet. And if you talked to people more often, you can learn new things that way.

*Relaxation/Decompressing.* You really think bombarding yourself with information and a bunch of changing lights will be relaxing? There are a lot of better ways to relax (like going for a walk) and being with your friends is one of them. Yet again, we are social creatures.

Now here is the real catch, the TV does the *opposite* of all of that! It makes it harder to be entertained or entertaining as you've never had to actively entertain yourself. It makes you easily bored as it rewires your pleasure center to crave more and not be satisfied with less. You get bad/limited information about useless junk instead of finding good information from reading or from other people. Finally, it makes it harder to relax or even fall asleep because of how it overstimulates you.

(My theory on entertainment is as follows: Sandstrom's (2013) 6 studies looked at different ways to measure weak tie interactions (treating a stranger more like a friend) and strong tie interactions (friends, family, etc.). While, in general, there was an increase in happiness with more interactions,

when they factored for extroverted personalities the increase in happiness was, at times, more marginal, less correlated, or, in one study, wasn't present at all (though sense of belonging still increased). I believe this is because an introvert, while often not saying anything at all or just the basics, would more likely move to simple conversations like: "And how is your day going?" An extrovert, however, either through desire, experience, or both, would probably make the conversation more enjoyable or fun: "I love your hair color! Where did you get it done?" This effort to make the conversation enjoyable seems to work for both parties' personal affect. And the paper points out that a possible explanation for weak ties increasing happiness could do with novelty and variety as they not only provide happiness but also prevent hedonic adaption. Obviously, the latter conversation example provides more novelty and variety. The paper itself thought a possible fun factor could explain some of the differences found in the six studies. If true, it goes back to the idea that if you want to be entertained, you should be entertaining. Or if you want to make yourself happy, make someone else happy. For introverts who want to learn how to train themselves to be more of an extrovert, as I'll later show, it seems like that isn't necessary, even harmful. An introvert simply needs to *decide* to be more of an extrovert.)

There. Now there is no reason for you to watch the television.

While it is clear you don't *need* television after all, you now have to ask yourself: "What do you really want out of life?" Clearly what you want is happiness. Well then the question becomes: "What is going to give you the most happiness?" and "What is going to keep you from it?"

Happiness is what comes from interacting with others. So the TV will distract you from doing just that. Ancient religions and science have always known the truth about happiness. While the term "Positive Psychology" might be new, the idea of studying happiness isn't. A study back in 1983 (Fordyce) showed that the study of happiness is "quite sizable" with over 650 studies to date. In his paper, Fordyce

advocates following the 14 fundamentals of happiness. These were pretty common to what we have today. For example, “flow” (being caught up in the moment by doing what you care about) seems to be a new concept that came from positive psychology, but it really isn’t. The 14 fundamentals included: keep busy, do more meaningful work, and be present, essentially flow. There is nothing new under the sun. And, as what agrees with modern research, the 14 fundamentals stated that “close relationships are the number one source of happiness.”

The paper also conducted 4 separate studies looking at the 14 fundamentals to see if happiness can be increased and sustained in people by using them. It worked! When asked which fundamentals were the most useful, they said, overall, “spend more time socializing,” “stop worrying,” and “be yourself.” But, think about it, the last two are often given as advice in the context of helping people to be more social (e.g. stop worrying what people will think of you and just be yourself around others). It seems to all go back to being more social.

One of the four studies conducted supports this. To test the effectiveness of different aspects of the program, they trained people on it using different parts. There were four groups. One group was trained and worked on the entire 14 points. Another focused on “spend[ing] more time socializing,” staying busy, doing more meaningful work, and planning for those activities. Another on a positive mindset: not worrying, not being outcome dependent, positive thinking, and being present. The final group focused on being more enjoyable to be around: developing a healthy personality, developing an outgoing, social personality, being yourself, and eliminating negativity.

(For those wondering, the thirteenth fundamental is that relationships are the number one source of happiness. The fourteenth fundamental is to put happiness as your chief goal. The last one might not be good advice as asking yourself if you’re happy has been shown to pull you out of the

moment, thus, decreasing happiness. So it's probably better to, and this is probably what the creator intended, put the focus on others, put the focus on the thirteenth fundamental.)

While all groups were successful in boosting their happiness, the "spend more time socializing" group had the biggest initial boost in happiness and ended with the highest number as well (the other groups weren't too far behind in the end, but socializing was the clear winner). It's interesting that just being more social (and possibly planning for more social activities) outperformed the group *trying* to develop a more outgoing, social personality, which I imagine had them try different, outgoing social routines with people (i.e., they were also more social but with an agenda, plan, or routine). And the *trying* to have a more social personality group, besides the control, performed the worst of them all, especially at the beginning. They actually saw a decrease in happiness at the start. While they were still up there at the end with the other training groups, they were last among them. (For those interested, the positive mindset came in second and the full 14 point program came in third.) This seems to go against the idea of using self-help material or books to become a more outgoing person (like the pickup artist stuff found on the internet). Perhaps one should stop with the self-help and simply socialize more. (Just socializing enough will probably improve your social skills anyway. And with opportunity cost, the TV and Internet is probably to blame for poor social skills.) While self-help is not entirely bad, it doesn't seem to be the best nor the easiest way to be happier. As I said before, even socializing with weak ties (like having a friendly conversation with the cashier) will leave you better off (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014). The act of socializing *by itself* is all you need to be happier.

(For those who are introverted and think they can't socialize without help, you're wrong. In several other studies looked at by *The Wall Street Journal*, it showed that introverts who *acted* like extroverts were happier (Reddy, 2013). Not only were they happier, but they didn't suffer any negative affect, like tiredness or nervousness, even after it was done. (Interestingly, extroverts who acted like



introverts did suffer from negative affect.) So it seems like *trying* to have more of an extrovert personality does harm, but *acting* like an extrovert doesn't. So "stop worrying" about having the perfect game plan to be outgoing, just be an extrovert in your own unique way, "be yourself." Have more faith in yourself. In other words, you don't need to work on being an extrovert by following some silly self-help program, you just need to *decide* to be more outgoing, you just need to do it. As Yoda said, "Do or do not, there is no try.")

Even if you are more concerned about being successful rather than happy at this point in life (you can probably have both, though), research shows that helping others in your field to achieve *their* goals of success, while still trying to develop your own competence in the field, will make you more successful than anything else, including just seeking mastery on its own or trying to do better than others (Levontin & Bardi, 2018). Essentially, that's because you help and motivate each other. Together you create synergy. And you can only really help others achieve their success if you... socialize with them.

Basically, you should always be focusing on your relationships no matter what stage of life you are in. The following statement is backed by a lot of research: "Relationships with members of one's social network play a role in an array of important life domains: the jobs that individuals get, the people that they marry, and their long-term health and happiness. Further, people enjoy the social interactions that form the basis of these relationships" (Sandstorm, 2013). And, as the paper showed, people who increased activities that did not involve socializing (TV watching, internet browsing, book reading, etc.) decreased their happiness. People who increased their socializing (with strong ties or weak ties) increased their happiness.

I would even go as far as to say that it is better to increase your socializing and *keep* your TV than to get rid of your TV and not increase your socializing. But if you get rid of your TV, what else are

you going to do other than socialize (again, don't let your internet become your television)? When you binge watch television shows, YouTube videos, or watch movies, that is time you could have spent socializing and improving your life. Don't waste your life. Trust me, it'll go by faster than you think.

What you want is happiness and the best way to get it is to socialize more. Television will most likely just distract you from doing that. Sure, watching television *with* a friend probably isn't that bad. But with a television in your house, you're much more likely to just watch it alone. If you must watch TV, do it at a friend's house. Be more social; get rid of your TV.

And tapering off just doesn't work. (If it doesn't work for cigarettes, why do you think it'll work for TV?) As *Allen Carr's Easy Way to Stop Smoking* tells you, set the date you'll smoke your last cigarette and stop. Decide the last day you'll watch TV and then throw them out. And look forward to the day you're going to throw out your televisions and get your life back! Be excited!

Will there be a bit of withdrawal for the first few days? Of course, but that's the same for any addiction. And like every addiction out there, you'll get through it. Don't forget, the people who got rid of their televisions don't miss them at all. Trust the science and get rid of your televisions. Focus on socializing, staying busy, and planning for more of those activities instead of watching TV.

Things will be different, but change is often what we need to makes ourselves happy.

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# **The Last Self-Help Book**

*Mental disabilities and real trauma need to be treated by a professional. No self-help (including this book) can really aid you in this regard. Go get professional help.*

*Uncopyrighted - 2017  
John Doe*

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# Preface

“Isolation is the dream killer.” I remember Barbara Sher’s words ringing in my ears with epiphany and sorrow. Sorrow as I remember all those years I wasted doing self-help... practicing all the different techniques, implementing the lessons taught by the so-called experts, and, not to mention, spending all my time reading about it. Unfortunately, or fortunately, hindsight is 20/20. It was all a waste. Not only did I not really improve myself, I made myself even more miserable, even more lost, even more alone. And I know now most successful people don’t bother using any complicated formulas as suggested in these self-help books. They never try hard in life. They just hang out with their friends and family who keep them in check and who help guide them to get what they want from life. That makes all the difference in the world. Isolation is the dream killer.

Being the shy kid I was, I rarely made friends. The few activities I joined were the ones picked out for me. Needless to say, without a shared interest I didn’t have much of a reason to hang out with anyone after the activities were done. And the few friends I did make while growing up were isolated themselves or tried to isolate me from others. I can only guess that they had their own insecurities that made them act this way. But, eventually, we also broke ties. That left me all alone. That left me to figure out life by myself, which is always a bad strategy at best.

In my self-help journey, it was me alone in my room reading a book, a magazine article, a blog, listening to a podcast, or watching a video. Of course, each one promised the world or I thought it contained some good information worth having. It was exciting and compelling stuff to learn at the time. It was both pleasurable and entertaining. How could I ever stop? But that’s part of the game the industry plays as they want you to get you sucked up into your own little self-help world to be, stay, or become even more isolated. (I should warn you, just about all of the self-help industry is very toxic with a lot of miserable people. You would be wise to stay away.) And when you’re isolated, it’s easy to convince you that bad ideas

are good ones and that you're an incomplete person without their advice. And the few times I did take action, even when I followed their advice to the letter, my results were bad to mediocre at best. This would just cause me to retreat even more into self-help trying to find the answer to my life. But as the years went by, no real progress, no real change. Isolation really is the dream killer.

# Introduction

If you're reading this book, I imagine it probably isn't the first self-help book you've picked up (but if it is, lucky you). There's a lot that is said in self-help. I don't know how anyone can expect to effectively remember or use it all. Sure, you'll find common themes in all the books (which will make you feel like you're on the right track), but even that is too much to remember. Even if you could, how can you make sure you'll use or remember that information when you need it. The answer: you won't.

And even if you do remember a few things so you can apply them to your life, how do you know if there aren't better self-help strategies out there, if the strategies you could come up with on your own aren't better, or what if it is these strategies that are actually holding you back in life?

It's no coincidence that there are a lot of successful people out there who have never read a self-help book. Or, if they did, it was something where they said "that's nice" after reading it and moved on to live their lives without giving it a second thought. And it's no coincidence that the few people who consume self-help like a starving man at an all-you-can-eat buffet usually end up going nowhere.

That's not to say self-help isn't useful, but, rather, **taking action and being with the right people is all that really matters in life**. But, if you're reading this book or other self-help material, you probably need a plan that will have you do just that. You need a simple strategy you can always remember and easily apply so that you not only start changing your actions but also start to actually live your life, a reminder to do what all the normal, successful people out there already do without thinking about it. And I'm going to give it to you right now. Here's the secret, if you can call it that, you've been searching for in self-help. It's called the three steps. You don't even need to read the rest of this book for it to work. This is all you have to do in life:

## 1.) Help yourself

- 2.) Ask for help
- 3.) Give help to others

That's it. It really is that simple.

Stop thinking life or how you have to handle it is harder than it really is. You don't need a complicated system to have a good life or to get what you really want.

Go ahead and write it down. While they sound like common sense, to align your new actions with these steps you'll need a reminder (as, apparently, you haven't been doing these steps or else you wouldn't have turned to self-help in the first place). Keep it in your wallet, in your purse, or on your wall so you don't forget. Really, I'm serious. Stop reading and do it right now. If you can't do that simple task, you'll never break your self-help addiction.

This is all the self-help advice you need. But with respect to *how* you do these steps is for you to figure out on your own (the rest of the book is basically dedicated to me proving this and offering a few ideas here and there). This also means you don't need to read any other self-help books.

No, there aren't 67 steps you need to follow to get what you want from life (they probably give you that many steps so you'll get trapped in their world of self-help where you keep giving them money for advice). That's just way too much information to actually use anyway. Self-help people sure do like the word seven: "Seven Habits of...", "Seven Secrets to...", "Seven Strategies that...", etc. Funny how it's always exactly seven. It's almost like they're more interested in making a marketable book instead of helping the reader... But even seven is too much to remember to effectively put into practice. But with three there is no way you're going to forget it: help yourself, ask for help, and give help to others.

So how is this different from all the other self-help material out there?

It's different because it really isn't self-help. Two of the three steps are focused on other people. You're getting help from others and you're

helping others. That really isn't self-help at all. (I included the first one as no one is going to break into your room, drag you out, and force you to interact with the world; you have to help yourself first.) And that's really the best thing you can do for your life: focus on others (as I'll show later in the book). Isn't that ironic? The best self-help advice out there is to not do self-help. Don't do self-help; instead, focus on other people. Let them help you and you help them.

Sure, you should do things for yourself to be healthy and active (eating the right foods, exercising, being social, etc.) and do the things that you find interesting, which you'll improve at with time as you do them more and more. But stuff like that should come naturally (at least if you're the type to be reading this book). You don't have to fundamentally change yourself. You don't have to "improve" yourself. You're fine the way you are. You just need to change your focus and point of view. You need to put your focus on other people, not yourself. But only when you accept yourself can you really start to put the focus on others. And if you're really pushing to improve yourself, then there is probably some unnecessary insecurity you haven't dealt with. Yes, some insecurities will always be there to a degree (that's just being human), but they often only serve to hold you back. However, a good way to forget about and get over those insecurities is, oddly enough, to start focusing on others. Again, don't focus on self-help; focus on others.

But focusing on others is a bit of an art, a skill you develop over time. (But at the same time, it's not as if you haven't been interacting with others your whole life. It's really about learning to let your natural abilities loose in your current situation.) And that's where the three steps can help. They'll keep you on track and act as a reminder to practice this skill so you'll get better at it.

So how do you go about helping yourself, asking for help, and helping others?

You help yourself by getting out of your room, going after your big dream in life, applying for that job or quitting your current job, making that call, having that talk, putting in the work, practicing that skill, going to that

group activity, making a good friend, sending an invite, making that appointment, ending that bad relationship, leaving a toxic situation, not doing things by yourself, ending or starting that habit, being brutally honest with yourself, letting yourself have some fun, etc. Asking for help is exactly as it sounds. It might be hard and scary at first (as is helping yourself), but the more you do it the easier it will get (same, again, with helping yourself). So keep asking for help with the things you are trying to help yourself with. Finally, give help to others. People need help, *everyone* needs help, but you often have to ask them what they need help with first. People might not have the courage to tell you, so you need to find the courage to ask. And you should give to others as it makes you a complete human being. It's what you're really looking for in life.

But, remember, *you* also need help as well. Don't let yourself be alone with your problems. Don't trap yourself with self-help. Don't let yourself be isolated when it comes to your dreams. You need people.

You might say, "What about all the details, exceptions, and things to look out for when you implement these steps? Won't I need this valuable information?"

You don't need to worry about the nitty-gritty. You'll figure it out as you go along. **The important thing is that you start doing the three steps.** The important thing is that you start taking action. Even if you read about the details ahead of time, you won't internalize them where it'll be useful. Yes, I'll go over some ideas to help you better understand the main concept, but I'm not going to hold your hand and go into every possible situation you might come across. That'll be a waste of my time and yours as knowing about and using the fine points in life can really only come from experience. It's like an athlete only knows how to play their sport better by playing it over and over again. Advice from a coach can help guide them, but only experience will make him or her a better athlete.

Besides, I think trying to understand the details is where people get hung up when it comes to self-help, instead of getting the experiences they need firsthand. The details are definitely interesting to read, but are they useful? Not really as you will all too soon forget them. And, too often,

people stress about remembering and using them instead of taking action. Experience is really the only way to internalize and get better at something.

You need to just focus on doing what needs to be done. You need to focus on taking action. Speaking of which...





# **The Three Steps**

# Help Yourself

“Take action” is a phrase found in just about every single self-help book out there. That should tell you how important it really is. But what if taking action is the *only* self-help advice you really need in life. That would make the rest of the self-help industry rather pointless.

I think taking action is so important that I put it at the front of the book instead of at the end like most self-help books. (The only other important thing to remember I already said at the very front of the book but I'll cover it again at the end.) Better to try stuff out, like the three steps, and learn as you go, which is really the only way you do learn in life, than to read and never really use any of the information. I'd rather have you close this book right now and take consistent action instead of reading it and going off to another self-help book.

How could taking action be the only advice you need? Well, it really comes down to the fact that we're all individuals.

Sure, you could take and apply what you learn from a self-help book in a systematic way. But that advice worked for the author, it doesn't mean it'll work for you. It could even harm you. Even if it seems to do you some good in the short-term, it might ultimately ruin your life in the long-term.

The best way to learn if you should do something or not is to do it and then think about the experience on your own (not blindly trust self-help material). The best way to improve at something is to do it over and over again. The best way to improve any situation is to do something about it. The best way to learn about yourself is to do something new. The best way to find out if something will work for you is to do it and see the results. Don't waste your time over analyzing or researching trying to find the *perfect* way. You won't find it. **But a *better* way will always show itself to you from taking action.**

You could argue any trick or system is bad for you. You could even argue the three steps in this book are bad for you and that you should just do

your own thing. (In defense of the three steps, it seems like the simpler and the more focus on action and other people the system is the better the results. I don't think it can get any easier than the three steps. And they're uniquely used by everyone as people have to come up with their own ways of applying the steps. They're actually more of a reminder to be proactive in life rather than a system to follow. But if you can think of a better reminder or way of thinking, go for it. However, I would at least start with the three steps. And, hopefully, one day you'll let go of self-help altogether.)

When you start forging your *own* path in life, you'll start figuring out what is good for you. And you forge your own path, you figure out what is good for you and what is bad for you, by taking action, not by reading self-help books.

Yet, that doesn't mean you just do whatever. You don't try everything in life once (you'll probably die if you do). But you also don't just keep doing what you've been doing because it's easy or in your comfort zone.

You have to try new things in life.

But with that advice, here are a few ideas to keep in mind when taking action.

## **Use your head**

You have a brain. Start using it. You don't need a self-help book to explain everything to you, to think for you. You don't need me to hold your hand. You have to learn to stand on your own without self-help. If you know something is bad for you, then don't do it. If you know something might be good for you, then test it out. If the results come back how you didn't expect them, then take time to think about it. In the end, all that matters is your *own* thoughts about life as those are the only thoughts you'll use. Don't use someone else's thoughts on life as your own as they probably won't work in your situation (unless they are in a similar situation, so advice from a friend or peer might be good stuff for you to

try... ask for help). For the most part, you need to figure out things on your own. So ask yourself why your experience was bad or different than expected and ask how you can make the results better or if you should even bother doing it again. It's not about *blind* action (doing whatever you're told in a self-help book), it's about *smart* action. Use your head and think for yourself. That's how you start helping yourself.

## **Trust your gut**

But you don't want to think so much that it prevents you from taking action. Thinking is usually best left *after* you've taken action, but you also don't want to take action that might harm you. So what do you do?

And with there being so many options in this world, it's easy to do nothing at all or to think you have to try it all out. But like I said, that last option will hurt you and it might even kill you. So, again, what do you do?

You trust your gut. Admit it, every time something bad happened there was probably some type of gut feeling you ignored. You're a lot smarter than you know. You just have to tap into that inner intelligence of yours. Yes, take action. Take lots of action. But you have to trust your gut before you take action as it'll not only help keep you from taking the wrong action, but it'll also help you take the best course of action. Trust your feelings. Trust your gut.

Plus, your gut will tell you in a split second if something is a good idea or not and you can then act on it *immediately*. But if you use the logical part of your brain, you'll burn a lot of time and energy planning and researching things that might ultimately end up being useless. Use that part of your brain *after* you've gained experience to analyze things, *after* you've taken action.

## **Don't live completely in your comfort zone**

There is nothing wrong with being in a comfort zone; you need it to keep sane in life. But being in discomfort is necessary to grow and learn about

yourself. You have to try new things. Staying in your room with your computer and TV all the time, or whatever you have, isn't going to do you any good in the long-term. In fact, it'll do you harm in the long-term. You have to start giving up your current comforts (you can just give up some of them or just give them up for a little bit, you don't have to do it all at once) and start putting yourself out there to really improve your life. You don't have to get rid of your computer or TV; you just have to take action on a consistent basis. You have to help yourself by putting yourself in an uncomfortable situation once in a while where you might grow and learn new things.

You need to put yourself in an unfamiliar or unusual, but safe, situation where you will most likely gain from it. And that's what helping yourself is pretty much all about (that's often what they mean when they say "take action" in a self-help book).

It's scary. It's always a little scary no matter who you are or how many times you've done it. But if you *keep* doing it, it gets easier to face that fear. But spending all your time in your room will just make things harder again. Your fear will grow. You just have to keep doing what scares you (as long as you also know it's good for you).

Whether that be registering for a new class or a business, attending that party you were invited to, applying for that job, going to the gym, going out with some new people, or meeting your new neighbors, you just need to do it.

Sure, you might not enjoy it, but you will still learn something about yourself and about the world around you. You'll learn more about what you don't like, what you do like, what is good for you, what is bad for you, and what will get you results. But you only discover that from experience and experimenting, not from staying in your room.

You have to be willing to give up your current comforts to do what you know is beneficial or what you think might be beneficial for you. If you're not willing to make a sacrifice here or there to try new things and do what needs to be done, your life will never improve.

## **Take your time**

When I say take your time, I'm not saying to do it slowly and I'm not saying to do it when you feel like it. What I'm saying is that it will take time to get results. Understand and accept that fact. When you learn a new skill (like playing the piano, learning how to ski, how to juggle, how to fence, how to draw, how to meet people, etc.) it doesn't come to you right away. You're really bad at it at first and sometimes you don't feel like you're improving at all, even though you are. So don't let yourself get discouraged, especially in the beginning. Just tell yourself to take your time repeating the process because in a few days or even a few weeks you're going to see improvements.

Helping yourself takes practice, just like any other skill. But you will improve if you keep at it. So don't let yourself forget to do it and don't let yourself get frustrated so that you end up quitting. Relax. Just take your time and keep at it.

(The truth is anything you work towards you will get, at least to some extent. Whether that be a new skill, social status, a new career, a car, money, etc., you will get it eventually. That means you don't really need self-help to get better at something or to improve your life; you just need to do the work. But you only have so much time to give (so don't waste it reading self-help). Thus, the question becomes, not whether or not you'll get it, but rather what should you be dedicating your time to? As you read this book, I think you'll see the three steps as definitely being worth it.)

## **Be honest with yourself**

Honestly, it can be hard to be honest with yourself. Why? Because you can get all caught up in these different worlds that distract you. But there is really only *one* world out there, the real world. And when you escape from reality to avoid your problems they grow. You binge watch your favorite TV show. You play that game for hours on end. You read those self-help books. (The reason the self-help world is so addictive has to do

with the fact that they *do* speak truths about this world, at the very least warped versions of them. But knowing these truths won't mean they'll help you. Most likely you'll do nothing with them and they'll just get you stuck in your own little world, you'll get stuck in your head. And if you're being honest with yourself, you'll have to admit spending too much time in your head, instead of taking action, got you here in the first place. Don't waste your time with self-help.) Again, there is nothing wrong with being in your comfort zone and doing enjoyable things up to a certain point. But there are a lot of things to distract yourself with and no one is going to tell you to stop. No one is going to come save you from yourself. So *you* have to save you from yourself. You have to help yourself. **It's *your* life; no one is going to change it for you.** Not your parents, not your dad, not your mom, not your friends, and, definitely, not your government. You have to save yourself.

And a good way to break away from your fantasy worlds, to see the big picture that is your life, is to slow down and reflect. Take a break from your distractions and take time to ponder what you should be doing with your life. That's the best way to figure out the action you should be taking, what you need to do to help yourself.

You need to take time to reflect on what's important, on what you *really* want from life, on what makes you *excited* to be alive, on what makes you *feel* alive, and on what needs to be done. If you don't know *your* motivation in life, not what your parents wanted for you, not what you *think* society wants from you (you do need to serve society, but the best way to do it, the best way to have a ton of energy to serve, is to find your inner motivation), then you can't change your life as change has to come from within, not from some self-help book. Remember, you're a unique individual so your desire will be different from everyone else. And motivation can't be implanted, it can only be discovered. That's why you need to find *your* motivation, and with it your willpower, to change your life. Find your true motivation in life, your true dream. Find that and all that's left to do is to take action, not read self-help material. You often read self-help because you don't know what your true motivation is in life. But reading will just leave you more confused. To find it you must look within. When you know it, you'll just start working on it, not read self-help.



When you know it, you'll know that you know it. It'll be a burning desire within you. It'll be like a raging fire you can't put out. And you need a burning desire/dream to change your life. And if you don't have one, you're pretty much wasting your life. **You need to get in touch with your true motivation in life.** So find your motivation in life. Help yourself.

But you might need some time to explore this idea. And I guess you could argue that I should have included reflection as one of the steps. But doing the three steps will naturally get you to start reflecting on things as you have to decide on what you need to do to help yourself with, on what to do in the real world. (Plus, the three steps will often have you take a break from your distractions. And a break will also naturally have you start to reflect on life as that's all there is to do.)

I really bring up reflection as a reminder to stop spending all your time playing games and watching TV (as they'll keep you from reflecting and they'll keep you from doing the three steps). Plus, putting some direct focus on reflecting is often needed to make sure you aren't fooling yourself.

However, you shouldn't have to reflect too much on what you really want from life, as you've always known that. You've just let yourself forget. So it shouldn't take too much time to remember.

But there is something else you should reflect on. Before I tell you that let me give this analogy. Life is a lot like golf, it's all about having the fewest number of mistakes. So what you should also be reflecting on is your past failures and how you could have prevented them, how you can fix your bad golf swing. Sure, your successes might have a common theme in them, but more often it is just luck that the situation called for one of your strengths, prior knowledge, and/or preparations (and your prepare by practicing/taking action, not by reading self-help). Failure, however, often happens because of your immaturity but all immaturities can be fixed. I know you might blame or want to blame something external for your hurt or failure, like a person, a unique circumstance, or something besides yourself. But bad things happen to everyone and bad things will continue to happen to you. Whether they become failures or not is all determined

by your reaction, or lack of reaction, to them. So if you can become more mature in your response, you can prevent and even turn those situations around. But it won't happen overnight; however, like a golf swing, you can slowly improve your maturity if you work on it.

And I can guarantee you that your failure, your immature response, had something to do with letting yourself stay in a bad situation (not helping yourself), not communicating about your situation (not asking for help), or putting the focus way too much on yourself (not giving to others).

But, like I said, how you do the three steps is up to you to figure out. And you either learn from the past or you repeat it. So reflecting on the past can be a good thing, but don't let yourself get caught up in that world. Don't relive your past. Learn from it and move on.

I think a good way to keep from getting stuck in your head about it is to get it out of your head and onto a piece of paper. Do a simple writing exercise where you list your major past failures and then list the things you could have done to prevent them from happening or to fix them. Pull out the main themes you see so you'll know what to work on, you'll know what to practice on for a better life. Now you're thinking for yourself instead of just believing what a self-help book says. Then destroy that sheet of paper so you don't keep thinking about the past. (If anything, this exercise will probably show you how important the three steps really are.)

Now that we've looked at your past, let's do another writing exercise with the present. Write down what is most important to your life (your friends, your family, honest relationships, hard work, freedom, adventure, building a better community, building a better life, etc.). Then write down what you did today (or yesterday if it's early in the morning) to live out what is most important to you. Or did you even bother that day to live out what's *most* important to you? Do your current actions align with what you really believe inside? I think most of you will see that they don't. But the good news is that you can start right *now* by taking action, by helping yourself. (You can keep repeating this exercise if you think it'll help keep you focused on what's most important in your life. But in the theme of keeping

things simple, I would just write what is most important to you at the top of the sheet of paper with the three steps.)

Finally, let's do a writing exercise about your ideal future. Write it down. No matter how crazy it is, write down your idea life (as long as it doesn't include something fictional like magic or superpowers). After that, write down what you did in the past year to work towards that better life. (You may not get it, but you will at least get *some* of it *if* you work towards it.) If the answer is nothing at all or very little, then you know your actions aren't what they should be. (You can keep this piece of paper that shows your ideal future. Or you can write the gist of it/combine it with what is most important to you at the top of the sheet of paper with your three steps.)

(I'm not going to have you write down your plan on how to get your ideal future as I'll show later in the book that's a bad idea. In short, you should only plan *with* other people in achieving your dreams. But I'll talk more about that later.)

And I think that's enough with the writing exercises (but please do them). They're basic enough to let you know if you're on the right track or not in life. But we don't want to get too crazy here as writing can also become a form of escapism.

Taking time to reflect is often the first action you need to do. Just don't get too caught up in reflection or you'll just get lost in your thoughts the same way you can get lost in those other worlds. And getting lost in your thoughts is what makes self-help so deadly in the first place as you end up not taking action. Don't do that to yourself. (Talking to someone about, or during, your reflection is a good way to keep from getting stuck in your head. Never underestimate the power of good communication.) Be honest with yourself, you need to be putting more emphasis on action, the right action at least, instead of pondering things. So take a moment to reflect, take a moment to be honest with yourself, to figure out the right action to take and then take it.

Once you get an idea, try it right away, test it out immediately. Feedback from the real world will let you know if you're on the right track or not.

Then you can reflect some more on that new information and try out some new actions.

Will you experience pain when you start interacting with the real world chasing after your motivation in life? Of course, but, and most important of all, you'll also learn from it. So don't waste time in your fantasy worlds. Focus on *doing*. Focus on being honest with yourself and take action.

## **Be in the moment**

And speaking about self-help being destructive to you getting results and not living in the past, let's talk about being in the moment.

We focus way too much time on the past or the future. The only thing that exists, the only thing we can take advantage of, is the present moment. I know it sounds spiritual (and, yes, the spiritual self-help industry loves to talk about this), but even if you look at it with simple logic, it's true.

(And if your religion makes you wary about using any concepts from the spirituality movement, many religions, including Christianity, covered this idea way before they ever did. The Bible talks about not dwelling on the past and not worrying about the future. And it covers how God is with you in this very moment. But it also talks about the need to wake up and take action in life and not be lazy with your limited time on earth. Help yourself. But for those who aren't religious and don't care to read about the subject, don't worry I won't cover it again.)

And I think this shines the light on one of the main problems with reading self-help. We often read it because we are focusing on "fixing" our past failures or we're planning for our ultimate future, even when we know it'll probably just stay a fantasy. We often let ourselves escape reality by planning for a delusional life imagining what it'll be like or by rewriting our past in our fictional worlds. Either way, we aren't focused on the present so we can't take advantage of it or really get anything done.

Why should we focus on the present? First of all, like I said, it's the only thing that really exists. Next, you can only really take advantage of your current situation by being aware of it. If you're focused on some future plan or past hurt, you'll miss the current opportunities right in front of your face. Finally, there is a genuine happiness that you get when you engage with the real world. Sure, those other distracting worlds are addicting and, thus, hard to give up, but they can't compare to the real thing. And you can tap into the real thing, the real world, at any time by being in the moment. Don't underestimate the power of the present moment.

(While I can certainly understand thinking about past events over and over again, unfortunately, it won't do you any good. If anything it'll leave you in a bad mood and distract you from taking advantage of the present. The best thing you can do is to learn from it and move on.)

To illustrate the point, I want you to think of your life before you discovered self-help. Despite your childhood being good or bad, I'm certain you had some of the best times of your life back then. Sure, it probably had to do with the fact that life was newer to you since you were younger. But I bet a bigger part of it had to do with you being in the moment. You weren't thinking about things as a kid, you just did things you liked. You didn't have all those weird self-help ideas going through your head. You didn't search for answers (read self-help) or give yourself big questions to think about (which isn't always a bad thing but everything has a time and place). You just enjoyed the moment and found the answers to life when life was ready to show you. Bottom line: self-help keeps you from being in the moment.

(Again, you could use that line of thinking to not do the three steps. But they are really just a reminder to be a good human being, to communicate, and to be proactive in life, which will benefit you if you do and harm you if you don't. You were, after all, miserable enough to turn to self-help. So if you stop doing self-help and go back to your old ways, you'll get more of the same results. That's why I recommend you keep a reminder close to you at all times. Put others first, communicate when you need help, and don't let yourself stay in toxic situations.)

So how do we be in the present moment? This might surprise you, being in the moment has to do with accepting yourself (it's because you don't accept yourself is why you run off to fantasy worlds and try to improve yourself). If you accept yourself, the good and the bad, your strengths and your weaknesses, your successes and failures, your good luck and misfortunes, your genius and your mistakes, and forgive yourself and let go of your ego, there is no reason to not be in the moment. In a way, you accept life and yourself unconditionally. And when you accept life unconditionally, all that there is left to do is to be in the moment.

But that doesn't mean you do nothing. Instead, you do what is *best* for you in the moment. That's how you know you're *in* the moment. Whether that means just enjoying the people around you, relaxing on your couch, asking for help, working on what you like to work on, working on what you *need* to work on, or taking that chance in life, that's how you let yourself be in the moment. You cherish what you have before you, your current opportunities and enjoyments, right here and now. You don't spend it lost in your head or searching for answers (that deep down you already know). Doing is how you get yourself to be in the moment. Thoughts and distractions will just keep you from it.

(Actually, I think the three steps are more of a reminder to be social with the right people and in the right way as good friends will help you be in the moment and accomplish great things more so than anything else in life. But it's up to you to get out there and find them. Help yourself.)

In a way, you take complete responsibility for your life (regardless of what life has done to you). When you're able to take complete responsibility for your life (but you're still able to forgive yourself for your past mistakes) your life starts to change as you free up time and energy to start changing it. When you take complete responsibility for your life, then all that there's left to do is to act.

And if you're doing something that is stressful or that seems overwhelming (like playing a sport, talking to a girl, or performing on stage), the best thing you can do is to be in the moment. If you try to use some gimmick, some memorized material, or try to think about and apply

everything you know on the subject in that moment, not only will you probably fail, but people will wonder what is wrong with you. It is best to act in those moments with a beginner's mind (act as if you're discovering the art for the first time, doing it with an open mind...hopefully, you can see how self-help material gets in the way of that). Do that and you'll subconsciously draw on all the knowledge you have while enjoying the moment and while making new connections and executing them on the fly. You'll perform at your best. And best of all, you'll be true to yourself.

Being in the moment is often described as getting out of your own way. Another similar, down-to-earth, non-spiritual way to look at it is to stop thinking about life and start living it instead. Stop living in a fantasy world and start living in the real world. And getting out of your own way means not wasting your time reading self-help. Self-help will just get you lost in your thoughts. Self-help will get you stuck in your head. And that's why self-help is often no help at all.

## **Be proactive *and* reactive**

It should go without saying to be proactive in life (that's basically what helping yourself is all about). Start doing things that will benefit you.

But you also need to be reactive to life. I'm not saying to be reactive to your problems (but, of course, you should react to and handle your problems before they get worse). What I'm saying is to be reactive when you see a problem coming. We all come across problems, that's what life is all about. But those who see a problem coming and react to it *before* it is a problem, they help themselves, are always better off.

And being in the moment will help you to be proactive in life (as you aren't wasting your time and energy in your fantasy worlds) and will help you to be reactive to things (as you're giving your full attention to what's going on in the real world). Then all that's required for you to do is to act, to help yourself.

## **First things first**

There are actions that are certainly more important than others (or at least bare more fruit). So the popular self-help advice of first things first does have merit.

But that's why it's so important to know your real motivation in life and to keep a reminder close by. Make sure the actions you do that day move you towards that big dream of yours. And make sure that it is the first thing you do that day so you don't have an excuse at the end that you ran out of time. Put first things first. (As I'll show later, your most important action will have something to do with other people and building relationships.)

And, again, if you don't know what your true motivation is in life, action and reflection will reveal it. Just more reason to focus on taking action. Just more reason to help yourself.

## **Best way to build a healthy self-image**

Some self-help books will talk about the importance of a healthy self-image, mindsets, positive thoughts, etc. Those things are good (not really great though) as they can help to make you feel good about yourself and that can motivate you to take action. But I have an even better way to build a good self-image, just take action!

When you take action you'll *know*, not just simply *think*, that you can help yourself. It's the best way to break out of learned helplessness. Take enough action and you will come across some success eventually. Now you'll *know* that you *can* be successful. Take enough action and you'll start getting better at whatever it is that you do and success will come. Now you'll *know* that you *are* a success.

Knowing and thinking are worlds apart when it comes to having a healthy self-image.



Focus too much on thinking up a positive self-image or thinking about self-help positivity in general and there is a good chance you won't take action or not enough action to really make a difference in your self-image. Focus on action and let the rest take care of itself.

While you can't take non-stop action (you aren't a robot), living in the real world will force you to take action. But living in a fantasy world will distract you from taking action. And, think about it, isn't thinking up a positive self-image living in a fantasy world? Work in the real world. Take action.

Sure, we all suffer from an unhealthy self-image from time to time and it *can* hinder you from taking action. But it can't stop you unless you *let* it stop you. And taking action, even if you have to start small and even if you have to start when you don't feel like it, will break you out of that rut. Reading self-help and practicing positivity, however, will probably just keep you stuck in your head. Help yourself. Start taking action towards a better self-image.

## **Be yourself**

I've already talked about this somewhat, but I want to cover it again: the truth is what works for one person won't necessarily work for you. What works for you won't necessarily work for someone else. We're all unique individuals. And what works for you needs to be learned through you, through your experiences. Besides, when you're being your authentic self, instead of doing some self-help garbage, you'll feel a lot better about life.

Sure, being honest with yourself will help you to be yourself, but, ultimately, knowing yourself has to come from experience, from interacting with the world, from helping yourself. Will you make mistakes? Of course. Will it hurt? Yeah, sometimes. But everyone makes mistakes. What matters is whether you learn from them or not. Whether you hide in your room and mope about things or if you get out there and try again but this time a little wiser makes all the difference in the world.

But part of being yourself is not blindly listening to self-help books. You are a unique individual with your own feelings. Start listening to them. They're telling you who you really are. So don't do things that don't feel right. Don't do things just because a self-help book told you to do them. Facing your fears is one thing, but if something doesn't feel right, it's probably best to listen to that feeling. So don't be afraid of new experiences, but do take the time to figure out if they're right for you. Listen to and accept your feelings on the subject. And the more experiences you get, the more feelings you'll tap into, and the more you'll start to discover who you really are.

Besides, the truth is every day is a self-improvement day, every day you learn something new to better your life. You don't need to be turning to self-help books. But how much you learn really depends on how much action you take, how much you help yourself. You learn the most about yourself from interacting with the world, not from reading someone else's thoughts. Be yourself and see what works for you.

## **Just start**

At any time you can grab life by the horns and start steering it in the right direction. If there is something you don't like about your life, then change it. You don't have to wait for anyone's permission.

If something is bothering you, then do something about it.

But, if you procrastinate on things, then it'll just leave you in a worse situation. So don't be putting things off. It'll hurt you if you do.

And if that's the case, then it's important to realize that **consuming self-help is most likely just going to keep you from taking action.**

Just start. Don't wait for that perfect moment. Actually, try to aim for imperfect as it'll help you start. You could even aim for terrible (or even the worst possible approach) as it'll get you to begin and, surprisingly (or

unsurprisingly, if you know how the world really works), it'll often give you good results or at least show you what you should be doing instead.

So don't get too stuck in your head trying to be perfect or trying to find that perfect moment. Just begin.

Even if you fail, it'll help you to start to get over your fear and it'll help you figure out what to do next as you learn from your mistakes. But reading self-help, pondering theory, or doing nothing will just have the opposite effect. Fear will start to grow, you won't really learn anything, and you'll get more confused on what to do for yourself. So it's better to try and fail than to waste your time reading self-help.

As I said, when you start helping yourself, you will succeed and you will fail. The problem that comes is that you often completely fail at first or you quickly hit a threshold of success. And when that happens, when people feel trapped again, they run back to self-help. But that doesn't work. But neither will only helping yourself.

Taking action in life is *not* enough. Like I said, you'll always be improving by taking action, but that won't improve your life fast enough in the limited amount of time you have. Helping yourself is critical. It's a required first step every time. That's why you should just start something instead of thinking about it. But taking action by yourself is never enough. There is only one way to get the results you want and it isn't self-help. If you want to break free you have to...

# Ask for Help

This is the most important part of the book by far as self-help tries to get you to rely on yourself, a bad strategy at best. But if you do this part of the book, you won't need self-help anymore.

(While the last step, giving help to others, is crucial to your happiness, there's a good chance you'll do it anyway the more you interact with people. And constantly asking for help will get you interacting with them. As for the first step, helping yourself often means asking for help. And that's usually the best way to help yourself in any situation.)

If you only apply one thing from this book, if you only take one action with it, let it be this.

Why? Because the only way you can break free, the only way to get the results you really want in life, is with the help of others. But they aren't going to give it to you without asking (no one can read your mind), you have to ask! You have to help yourself first.

Most of your problems in life came from trying to do life by yourself. By asking for help, it is forcing you to interact with the real world. It's forcing you to stop living in your own little self-help world. It's forcing you to be social. And when you're social, your problems and your life are no longer just your own.

Going it alone, only focusing on the first step, will result in bad and/or unproductive action. You'll just get frustrated. You need people. Isolation is the dream killer.

**If taking action, helping yourself, isn't giving you the results you want in life, that's because you haven't been asking people for help. Don't do life by yourself.**

What determines if you fail or succeed in life most often comes down to whether you are willing to ask for help or not.

Yes, life really is that simple.

Now I'm not talking about asking someone for help with your homework (but if you do need help with your homework, certainly, go ahead and ask). What I'm telling you is to ask for help with the things you want most out of life (sometimes all you really need is the emotional support, but you *do* need the emotional support). Yes, it'll take being honest with yourself to know what to ask, but it isn't really that hard to figure out.

The hard part is being willing to ask. Why? Because our dreams often seem too big to be accomplished. So it creates fear in us that we often justify as being something else (like a sudden loss of interest, telling yourself you don't deserve it, or some other silly reason). These huge dreams of ours will certainly be a burden on anyone we ask, so why ask? But there is this incredible synergy created when we ask that it would be foolish not to (and people love to help). And, surprisingly, they can be rather easy to accomplish, even the big ones, when you get the help of others. And the bigger the dream the more likely people will want to help.

Asking for help is so underrated.

And keeping your dream a secret will often kill it faster than anything else. Just keeping secrets in general will tend to do you more harm than good. You need to open up to people. You need to ask them for help.

But don't feel bad for asking. You're a human being. You need help. And you deserve to be helped. (Everyone else got to where they are with the help of others, don't you deserve the same?) And the great news is there are a ton of people out there who are willing to help you. All you have to do is ask. All you have to do is help yourself.

And I know you might feel greedy or selfish asking for help, but people love to help. It's in our nature. It makes us feel good. Why shouldn't you give them the opportunity to feel good about themselves?

However, I know you might also be hesitant to ask for help because you don't know how to ask or who to ask, so I'll cover that right now.

## **Who to ask for help**

Anyone and everyone, the more the better. The more people who know that you need help, the more likely you'll get it.

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule. There are certainly people who you should never ask for help. Who are they? I don't have to tell you. There is a reason why we tell *kids* to not talk to strangers. But you're an adult. You know who to ask, stranger or otherwise.

But don't get me wrong, you will make mistakes. You will ask the wrong person for help (only slightly wrong as I'm pretty sure I don't have to worry about you asking a deranged person for help), but you'll learn from it and you'll get better. So how do you ask?

## **How to ask for help**

It's pretty much the same idea as I just mentioned, the more you ask the better you'll get at it. So I would say focus more on asking (focus on taking action) rather than asking the perfect way. The latter will just get you stuck in your head and you should know by now how bad getting stuck in your head is for you. (Remember, if you're having a hard time finding the courage to ask, try asking poorly or even the worst way possible as it'll get you to start.)

However, I will give this piece of advice, the more you communicate the better the results.

If you need help with something, tell them *why* you need help, *what* you've already done and what your current ideas are, *who* you've already talked to, *where* you've already gone for help, *how* they can help you, etc. (Barbara Sher mentions that when you tell someone your dream it's important for them to know what is keeping you from getting it as then

they'll be more likely to help out.) The more they can understand where you're coming from, the more they can relate to you, the more likely they'll be willing to help and the better they'll be able to help. You can't overlook the importance of communication. You need to let people know what you want. You need to let people know what is on your mind. They can't know or help otherwise. And often that communication starts with you asking for help.

There really isn't that much else to say other than you're probably not going to ask for help. You'll read this chapter and just move on. Even after you've finished this book, you might do something to help yourself, but you probably won't get around to asking for help as it's a much bigger psychological hurdle to climb. But if you don't you won't make enough progress and you'll just escape to your own little worlds again.

(You probably keep escaping from the real world, and why you have no one there that you're willing to ask for help, because you have no real friends. And most people naturally do the three steps, without being told about them, because they have friends. If you think about it, the main point of this book (one of them at least) really is to, **instead of focusing on or reading self-help, take action and get help from your friends** and the results in your life are going to be thousands of times better. Help yourself. Ask for help. But if you don't have friends, then your massive action should be about making them. Just keep in mind, making friends is a gradual process that can't be rushed. However, you can't make friends unless you first help yourself by communicating, by interacting with people. And most friendships start by asking someone for a favor. So start asking people for help and you'll start making more connections with others. And your life will start to fall into place.)

So here is my advice to you, use a simple tally system. (Again, this isn't so much a self-help system but rather a reminder.) Put it somewhere you can easily see. You could even put it on the back of the piece of paper with the three steps that is in your wallet or purse. Mark it each time you ask someone for help with your dreams.

And every time you feel stuck, hopeless, depressed, or frustrated in life, look at the tally system and see how many people you have asked for help.

If the answer is no one or very few, then you have no right to complain or to be hopeless. You know what needs to be done to break free so go do it.

## **Finding people to ask**

I know you probably still feel shaky about who and how to ask for help as it probably seems like I'm suggesting you go talk to strangers off the street (you certainly could, but I imagine that would be a little too difficult and awkward for the average person).

Let me offer a little structure on asking.

First, talk to those closest to you like your friends, your family, and your neighbors. You'll be less afraid to ask them and they're often easy to access, so you can quickly get this idea or problem off your mind and into the real world. If you don't, you'll be very likely to start overthinking your problem/question, get stuck in your head while it grows in your imagination, and end up asking no one.

Then you can reach out to organizations and well-known people in the community. This one will take a little bit of courage, but often there is a group or person that can help with your specific problem. Sometimes it'll cost money. But even if you can't pay, you can usually still get some good information from them that'll help you out.

Finally, you can ask for help from the people who just happen to be around you at the moment. This one will often take even more courage if you happen to be surrounded by strangers (and this is why I mention it as your last option), but you'll be surprised at the wealth of information or just plain good ideas random people can provide you. Plus, strangers are often willing to help you in ways that the people you know wouldn't. (I



think it's a psychological thing. They want to know that if one day they need to ask a stranger for help that they'll get it. And by being the helping stranger this time it feels like they're making it so. Or maybe people just like to impress strangers with how much they can help. Who knows? But people love to help others anyway, so don't overthink it or worry about it.) The help of a stranger might be exactly what you need to break free.

But an often neglected way to find people to help you is to join an interest group that shares your ideas and values as it'll be a lot easier to ask like-minded people. Even if they don't share your dream or type of dream (it's probably better if you find a group that does, but that can be a rare thing), when you share the same interests in something with another person they'll be more willing to help you out. Basically, people are often more friendly and thus more helpful to those who they can relate to with a common interest.

Barbara Sher has another way to find people to ask for help called an Idea Party. An Idea Party is where you get people together, especially those who don't know each other too well (acquaintances, neighbors, etc., remember, strangers are often willing to help out more than you think and in ways people who know you won't), specifically to figure out how they can help each other fulfill their dreams. Call up some people to come to your house and figure out together how to make each other's dreams come true. (You can even make it a lunch or a dinner as an incentive for them to show up.) Plus, you'll all feel great about helping each other out.

And there probably are some other unique opportunities you alone have in your life for you to get people together to ask for help. So I would challenge you to come up with your own ideas. But, remember, the most important thing is to keep asking people for help. The more you ask the better you'll get at it, the easier it'll be for you to ask, and the more likely you'll get what you want.

Finally, don't forget to help yourself. Helping yourself is the first step. And the good thing about helping yourself is the fact that people will be more willing to help you if they see you already helping yourself, if they see you

putting in the work. That's just human nature. That's why it's always a good idea to do the steps in order.

Remember, you're never too old, too wise, or too experienced to ask for help. So don't let your pride keep you from asking. We all need help in getting what we want from life.

While asking for help will get you what you want, you might not be happy when you finally get it. That's where the last step comes in.

So help yourself, ask for help, and that brings me to...

(I'm going to break here and address those who have been reading self-help for years. There's probably something really off about your life and it's probably time to get some professional help. When it comes to people who read too much self-help I think there are two groups: those who read it to escape boring, empty lives, who often never ask people for help or never talk to people about their problems like they should, and those who have suffered real trauma. While the latter definitely needs to see a professional, I think both groups would benefit from talking to someone about their dysfunctional life and a professional is your best bet. You might have to go through a few before you find one that clicks, but you really need talk to someone if that's how your life is right now. Ask for help.)

# Give Help to Others

If you think this is just about giving back to the world for all the help you've gotten, it's not. Just how asking for help actually has a lot to do with helping others (as it allows them the enjoyment of helping you, to break free from their old routine), giving to others has a lot to do with helping yourself. When you give it creates this abundance to your life.

It's hard to explain, but those who focus on giving end up getting even more back.

You might not get money, but you'll get more than you ever need. Not that you should necessarily give just to get things back, rather it should be unconditional giving. In other words, you give simply to give. But cultivating that giving attitude takes practice. And I think it's a lot easier to want to give by getting first. When you have a lot in life (again, not just necessarily money or material goods) or when you feel fortunate for having something you naturally want to give back (even if it is out of guilt). Again, that's why it's best to do the three steps in order (at least when starting out) as it'll put you in the mood and create the opportunity to give.

And you have to cultivate this giving mindset (even though I do believe it is in our nature to give) as we've been taught by society to be selfish individuals who don't care about other people's feelings and desires. But it's so important to practice giving as **real happiness only comes from giving to others.**

Giving is also the fastest way to make friends, the fastest way to make sure you aren't doing life all by yourself (and that's probably what caused you to turn to self-help in the first place). Sure, asking for help will probably help you make friends (communication will just about always improve a situation). But when you are giving to people (not just material goods, but compliments, kindness, resources, etc.), when you are of serve to others, they'll want to be your friend. In short, if you want a friend, be a friend (be friendly to others).

And you typically have to give before you receive, so leading with giving can often be the best thing to do. So help yourself by giving to others.

(Some say you are best just doing the last step. That is, focus on helping others and forget about your own desires. Putting the focus entirely on others will probably only benefit your life. But that's something you will have to experiment with on your own.)

And isn't that what we're all here for, to serve others?

But as much as we all want to believe in this sacred, unconditional loving connection to all of humankind, there's still the individual need to make things happen for ourselves, to be responsible for our own lives, to pull yourself up by your bootstraps (even if you just need to do it a little bit).

Again, and I know I keep repeating myself here, that's why I suggest you do the steps in order. You help yourself first, then you ask for help, and, finally, you give back to others.

But how do you give? I don't think anyone can tell you that. Helping yourself and asking for help is pretty straightforward (they mostly just require you to face your fear). But giving is more of an art you develop over time (and you can only develop that art if you practice it). Giving involves not only knowing yourself but also knowing the needs of those around you. You can always ask them (communication will always improve a situation), but people often don't even know what they really want or what will make them happy (that's why it's important for *you* to reflect on life, to be honest with yourself, and to keep trying new things as they allow you to know what *will* make you happy in life).

It goes back to everyone being a unique individual (though they don't always know themselves that well) and also there being so many ways to give. You can give to charity or directly to the homeless. You can give your time to your friends or to a fatherless kid who needs guidance. You can give an unexpected gift to a coworker or take them out to lunch. You can give your experience or just moral support (even if you are paralyzed from the neck down, you can always give words of encouragement and

that's often the best gift of all). What you can give the best at, what makes you feel the best when you give it, and how best to give it is up to you to figure out. And you can only figure it out by trying things out, not reading about them. And it's so important to figure out how you can give back as it's the only way to true fulfillment. Listen to your feelings.

But as much as we're all unique individuals, we're all still human. As such, we all want to feel appreciated. So sometimes the act of giving itself, even if you have no idea what they really want, is all that people want to receive. So just focus on giving. Don't worry about doing it perfectly.

However, I will offer a little bit of advice when it comes to giving to help you along. First, don't confuse helping others with pushing your values on people. People should be free to choose their own values in life. In other words, don't try to change people. Trust me, you'll be wasting your time. Instead, you should honor their individuality (find out what makes them happy). Next, don't help people who don't want to be helped. Again, people have the right to freedom and that freedom includes the choice to be helped or not. And you have no right to take that away from them. Also, don't let people dictate your life. Giving doesn't mean you do what people tell you to do. To really give you have to be happy first and that involves loving yourself. And if you love yourself, you'll communicate when things don't feel right. Finally, don't be a martyr. Don't kill yourself trying to help people and don't help people who bring you down. Some individuals out there will hate you for no other reason than you're a person that they can hate. And they're free to do that. But you're also free to not waste your time with them. You'll do a lot more good in this world if you work with people and do actions that lift you up.

You don't have to give to everyone, you don't have to be a living saint (and trying to be one probably goes against being true to yourself). You should be nice to everyone, but you don't have to be putting yourself into everyone's lives. Instead, find people who you want to give to and who appreciate you giving the most. (There are other people who can better help everyone else. Remember, we're all unique individuals.) Find your community.

I know that seems like a lot to remember, but, honestly, you'll just have to figure it out first hand from experience. I'm just giving you this information so you'll hopefully connect the dots sooner as you learn through adversity, same for all of this book. However, **you can only really understand what is said in this book by *doing* the three steps**, by taking action. Help yourself. Like I said, giving to others is a bit of an art, so you have to practice it. But you *will* get good at it if you practice.

If you do end up reading a lot of self-help after this book (or maybe you've already read a ton of it), one thing you'll notice echoed over and over is the importance of other people in all aspects of your life like your career or business, your health, your happiness, and so on. The power of association and whatnot. But instead of reading about it, why don't you just live it. Put the focus on making other people happy and being around those you love. Give to them. But you have to be the one to make that effort to get that kind of life. You have to put yourself out there, ask for help, and help others.

(And if you have read a lot of self-help, it's probably best to just forget about it all. That might be hard for some of you as you'll have to accept it was a waste of time, but that really is the best thing you can do. Not only will thinking about all that stuff probably get you stuck in your head, but it's best to face your current situation with a fresh mind and your full attention. And just like getting rid of a lot of material goods you don't need, you'll feel better once you get all that junk out of your head.)

And when you focus on giving people what they want, doing what will make them happy, they will want to be around you. People like to feel good, and if you can give that to them, they'll want to be with you. But, again, you have to make the effort. You need people. That's why it's best to put your focus on them instead of self-help.

And giving is also how you make a living. People only hand you money after you give them a product, a service, or a promise of such. So giving is how you get rich (it's obviously not the only way but definitely the best in regards to your happiness). Making money is all about finding out what

people want and giving it to them. Communicate. The more you can give and the more it meets other people's desires, the more you'll get back. But, again, what you are best suited for when it comes to contributing the most to the world and in return receiving the most back (and, as I keep saying, not necessarily money but happiness) can only be learned through experience and experimenting (and a little bit of communication). It'll probably have something to do with one of your strengths. But how to best apply that strength to the real world has to come from experience, not from reading business books/self-help. Let the real world teach you what it wants you to give.

(And if you're broke, make another tally list and start tracking the number of people you've helped get what they really wanted out of life. If the number is zero, then you know why you're broke but then you also know what needs to be done.)

There is one last thing I want to leave you with. There is something that could be better than the three steps. It's to just do what you enjoy. Because what you really enjoy (if you're being completely honest with yourself) is spending time with those you love. And as long as you *communicate*, you'll naturally help each other out and push each other forward, you'll naturally do the three steps (so you could change your three steps to just communicate, be social, to just keep putting yourself out there with people, or whatever works for you). Being with others is what will allow you to get the most of what you want from life. It'll make you happy, so why wouldn't you do it?

And that covers all three of the steps. But we're not done yet because I know there's a good chance you'll go back to self-help anyway. So let me spoil all those "great" self-help ideas out there so you don't waste your time and energy. Let's talk about all that bad self-help out there waiting to trip you up.





# **Bad Self-Help Ideas**

# It Won't Get You Unstuck

If you aren't miserable, perhaps you're just stuck in life (but if you're stuck, trust me, you're miserable, you've just numbed yourself to it with different comforts).

The answer isn't self-help but doing something to improve your situation. Even if you can only improve it a little bit, you can then improve that new, slightly better situation a little bit more. Then you repeat that, again and again. You just have to help yourself. Don't let your feelings of apathy or fear keep you from taking action. Don't run to self-help as an easy way to feel better about your situation. And if apathy or fear is the reason you fail to take action, running back to self-help is the worst thing you can do. I know you think you'll find something that will help or accelerate your progress towards facing your fears or getting what you want from life, but it won't. (Only other people can really accelerate your progress and that's about it. And you'll probably need them anyway to break free. *Tell* people what you want from life. That's how you get it. So don't be afraid to tell people your desires. Ask people for help.) By not taking action, by staying in your room reading self-help, your fear, apathy, and loneliness will just grow. You're making the situation worse. You just have to face your fears.

I know those books have little tricks in them, like affirmations or whatever, to try to help. But, in my opinion, even if they do some good, you'll probably just get stuck back in your head again, you'll get stuck back in your own little self-help world. Why risk trapping yourself again? Instead of doing something that *might* work to help you face your fears, do the thing that you know that *will* work to help you face your fears. I can guarantee facing your fears, or even *trying* to face your fears, *will* improve things. It might not seem like it at first, it might seem like you're just spinning your wheels, but if you keep at it, you will see results. So forget those tips and tricks and just do what needs to be done.

(The only real benefit I can see from self-help is to offer you some guidance in the right direction. That's why I created this book. But you can get that same guidance from good people you know. And the right

direction in life is genuine connection with others, not fake ones. Isolation is what caused you to get stuck. And self-help is what's perpetuating your isolation. Stop trying to do it all alone and reach out for help. Ask for help.)

Even when you do get what you want from life, even if you do get unstuck from your current situation, you might get stuck with an empty feeling inside. But I can guarantee fulfillment if you help other people. Give help to others. The three steps will give you what you really want in life, they'll help you get unstuck, but how you apply the three steps is up to you to figure out.

# **There is No Secret in Self-Help (And It Won't Help With Your Fears)**

I wish there was some secret to getting what you want in life, but there's not. You just have to put in the work. And I wish there was some secret to getting over your fears, but you just have to keep trying until you do. But if there is some strategy that works well for you, you're probably going to have to learn it on your own. And you learn things by trying stuff out. Help yourself.

For the most part, life is all about figuring things out for yourself. But you *can* figure things out. You can blaze your own trail. You can have an amazing life. Of course, you'll have your good days and your bad days. You'll have days where you feel like you made amazing progress, but most of the days you'll *feel* like you made none or that you even went in reverse. But you *are* making steady progress, even if it doesn't feel like it at times. So keep at it (actually, strategic breaks can help you improve faster but not if you let them break your consistency). So keep trying new things, keep putting yourself out there. You'll figure it out. But you won't get there sticking to your old habits, staying in your room, and doing the same thing each day. You won't get there if you keep reading self-help. You won't get there if you don't face your fears.

And you get over your fear by keeping at it, by chipping away at it little by little. Running back to self-help *will* just halt or even reverse your progress. You just have to keep trying, keep pushing forward as you will get somewhere but only if you try.

Again, it can be easy to run back to your self-help books thinking, or hoping, you'll find some secret answer. But, and I can't say this enough, there is no secret. You just have to start working to get unstuck. You have to start working to get the life you want. Help yourself.

And, like I said, if you really want to accelerate your progress towards being successful or facing your fears (and maybe this is the secret you've been looking for) only other people and your community can really push

you forward in that regard. We are a social species. But they won't help if you don't ask. Ask for help.

Besides, what you really want is happiness, not success. However, working with and being around the right people will bring you both.

The feeling of being stuck, actually being stuck, and not getting what you desire in life has a lot to do with the people you surround yourself with. They lack resources or intelligence, they annoy you, they don't understand you, they're not willing to help, and/or they drag you down. Well, guess what? There are plenty of fish in the sea. You can have your own group of people you love. But it's up to *you* to find them. You just have to ask people for help. You have to help yourself. *You* have to go after the life you want.

Like I said, you *can* ask strangers for help. Strangers are new people with new possibilities for you. But going to some activity you like where you can meet new people with something in common is probably your best bet. You don't have to put up with those who you grew up with. You don't have to put up with bad people. But you do need to find the courage to stop living how you've been living and help yourself.

There is no secret in self-help. You just need to find the courage to put yourself out there.

# Grit Is The Ticket to Misery and Failure

Grit works! But it's not going to give you what you really want in life. In fact, it's going to leave a really bad taste in your mouth.

Perseverance always works. And grit is the type of perseverance where you stick to it even when it hurts. To me, that's not the best way to get things done. If you did ten years at a job with your friends who you loved spending your time with, would you say that you had perseverance? Of course, you did it for ten years straight. Now would you say you had grit? No, you always enjoyed going to work each day and you only went to work because you enjoyed being with your friends. So you don't have to use grit to accomplish big things.

Whatever you're aiming for, give it enough time and you'll get it. But you only have so much time in life, which means you can only aim for so many things and get them. So what are you aiming for? Are you aiming for the right things? Too often, people use grit to go after the wrong things in life.

Besides, it's not the destination that matters, it's the journey.

And if you're using a ton of grit in life (sometimes it *is* necessary or best for you to use a little bit of grit here and there), how can you possibly enjoy the journey?

You just have to learn to relax and enjoy the adventure that is life. Don't be so serious. Don't be so demanding of yourself all the time. Life is meant to be enjoyed.

While grit might get you success, praise, worldly pleasures, and even a lot of cash, things like that won't fulfill you (besides, you can get those things a lot faster and easier by working with others). After making all those sacrifices and doing all that hard work to find nothing at the end, it'll leave you miserable. While grit will get you what you want, it'll fail at giving you what you need. And what you need are some friends. What

you need is to enjoy your life while you have it. What you need is to be honest with yourself.

Forget the grit; focus on being who you really are. Stop trying so hard and let things be.

(To be fair, what I call perseverance others might call grit. The main point is to be able to enjoy life for the most part while you're alive. And, especially, don't make yourself miserable for things you really don't care about. And I'm not against using grit to make your dreams come true as long as it's something you do without thinking about it because it means that much to you. Like I said before, be true to yourself.)

# Being a Salesman Isn't the Answer

I know a lot of people and self-help books will tell you life is just a numbers game. Just do it enough times and you'll see results.

Even with this book, I know you're thinking: "Oh boy, if I help myself as much as I can, ask enough people for help, and give help to a ton of other people, I'll have anything I want and a wonderful life!"

While that's true, you're not a robot. A numbers game will drain you mentally and physically. It's not natural. Remember, grit isn't how you want to live your life. But isn't life a numbers game? To a certain extent, absolutely. But if you live your life that way you won't be happy and I guarantee you'll be a lot less productive than you think.

With the three steps and me telling you to keep doing them is really about changing how you approach life. So it's really *not* about doing the three steps as much as possible; it's about training yourself to not suffer in silence, to communicate more with others, to ask for help when you need it, and to start focusing on others and building relationships. It's about learning how to be a good person who is connected to others, not using people or making yourself into a robot.

Yes, you can aim for a certain number each day if you want, but view it as a daily workout. (While I'm against planning alone as you'll read about later, making yourself miserable in obtaining your dreams, and trying to force habits, I'm not against setting specific daily goals (I'm not necessarily for it either) as long as they serve to keep you on track to develop you as person, to improve your relationships, to help you focus on your dreams, and to focus on others. While there is a Zen-like quality to this book, you'll still need *some* self-discipline and focus to make sure you're putting the most important things in life first.) You work out your muscles in the gym and, here, I'm getting you to work out your personality at home. And a workout has to come to an end and you have to recover for a period for it to do any good. But you also have to be consistent at it for it to work. So put in the work each day (even if you have to start with



very light weights) and you'll see the results in time. But overdo it and you'll just get burnt out or injured.

Just start by doing a bit of the three steps today. Help yourself or ask someone for help. And then try to do a little bit more each day after that. Before you know it, it'll be part of your personality and you'll start getting results.

I would suggest you start by looking at your piece of paper each morning (or at night planning for the day ahead) and ask yourself what is one thing you can do to help yourself, something you can ask someone for help with, and one way you can give to others for this day. Try to aim as small as possible. While it might not feel like you are doing much, not only are you ingraining the steps into your personality but those little actions will add up to make a big difference. Start small. Start slow. But *do* start. And don't stop.

However, and I can't emphasize this enough, don't stress when it comes to the three steps. Just slowly start to incorporate them into your life. I know this sort of goes against the tally system I gave you earlier in the book, but I gave it as it's better to do too much of the three steps than not doing them at all. (It's more of a reminder than anything else, another one as you can't really be reminded enough, to start doing the steps.) However, the best thing you can do is to naturally include them into your life.

But just blindly doing the three steps as much as you can is no different than just following what those self-help books say. Will you get some results? Yes, but you'll burn out and get tired of it. Then you'll move on to the next self-help technique you find interesting. Be true to yourself instead. Do what feels right. Slowly growing and maturing as a person, learning to gradually incorporate the three steps into your life, will feel right.

Don't be a salesman like all those self-help books tell you to do. Don't treat people or life like a numbers game. Instead, be true to yourself.

(Most people who have tried being a salesman at some point in their lives will tell you how hard and fruitless of a job it was for them. While there are certainly salesmen in this world who can make a living at it, the most successful salespeople I see will tell you it isn't a numbers game. They'll tell you it's about building relationships and helping people get what they want. And that's what life is all about.)

# Writing Down a Plan Is Often Planning to Fail

No, I have nothing against planning and I find it beneficial, helpful, and even necessary at times. I'm just against how the vast majority of people plan when it comes to their ideal life. Too often, the way they plan guarantees they will fail in achieving it.

Don't get me wrong, you do have to plan for life. Failing to plan is planning to fail. And I think writing things down can serve as a great reminder (that's why I had you write down the three steps). But don't try creating some type of secret treasure map, some ultimate plan, that will lead you to the promised land. Doing something like that isn't good for you (at least not when you do it alone). It goes back to the idea of taking action and not being stuck in your head imagining these fantasy worlds. Besides, I can guarantee those long-term plans you come up with on your own won't work out (at least not the way you expect them to), which means they're ultimately a waste of your time. Instead, take advantage of your current opportunities.

Planning and scheduling for the short-term, the next day, week, or even month, is mandatory in a life where you work (but don't forget to plan for the fun activities you want to do as well). And having a wish or a dream written down is a good way to keep yourself from drifting in life or wasting time on unimportant things. (And adding that dream to your piece of paper with the three steps wouldn't be such a bad idea.) But too often planning the details for that dream turns into you living in la la land as deep down inside you'll think it's too big of a dream that you'll never have and that all you can really do is fantasize about it. When you plan alone things will seem impossibly big.

Plus, planning for what is in between your short-term planning and your ultimate wish is almost impossible as life will never unfold the way you expect it. It becomes a waste of time. Especially, and you'll notice I'll keep saying this again and again, if you plan alone.

Actually, the only exception to the rule of over planning being harmful is planning with others (as they'll keep you accountable, keep you in the real world, and as a group they can effectively fill in a lot of the in-between areas through their vast experiences and knowledge). But when you plan with other people you don't *have* to write it down, though you certainly can (and you probably will have to write some items down in a schedule so you don't forget them). The most important thing is that you keep *communicating* about your plans with others. As long as you keep an open dialogue with others about what is going on in your life with your hopes and dreams you'll do just fine. But since it's our personal fantasies we're talking about here, we too often plan alone out of embarrassment. You have to get over that. Besides, planning with people and letting people help with your plans *is* taking advantage of your current opportunities.

So, yes, get in the habit of scheduling your life so you show up on time and so you won't forget appointments. (And, no, there is no best or secret technique for scheduling you'll find in a self-help book. You just have to keep doing it as you'll get better over time and figure out what works for you.) And after you've reflected on life, you should be able to, and you should for the sake of clarity, write down what really matters the most to you, what you really want out of life, and keep it close by.

But after that, you need to start talking to people, you need to start asking for help. Don't plan anything on your own. It's just too risky you'll get caught up in your head in a fantasy world instead of taking action. Planning like that will cause you to fail. If you do want to write down a plan, do it *with* people.

Plus, planning with others also gives you the opportunity to give, to help other people make their dreams come true. That means if you're willing to help yourself by getting a group together, you get to do all the three steps in one.

Again, nothing wrong with planning. But if you let planning or researching a topic by yourself take you off to this fantasy world where you do nothing

with it (as the vast majority of people do) you're planning to fail. But every time you take action in the real world, when you help yourself, the best course of action will start to emerge and it'll be clear what you need to do next. And then you don't have to worry about perfecting your plans. But you won't find that out hiding in your room researching and plotting. You need to live in the real world with real people. And by interacting with real people, you're much more likely to get what you want from life. In other words, take action, help yourself, and learn if it's a good action or plan, see what the results are. And if that process is taking too long to get you what you want, start getting other people involved. Ask for help.

So if you just focus on taking action (and getting help when you need it), there really is no need to plan. Or, rather, the right plan will start to emerge on its own when you start taking action and communicating with others about what you want.

Besides, there's no guarantee when you get what you want, that secret fantasy of yours, that it'll make you happy. So writing down a master plan by yourself and applying grit to it is probably not the best idea in the world as you'll be miserable as you pursue it and could be miserable once you get it. It's better to enjoy the journey called life while you go after what you want. And when you do things with others, like letting them help you with your dreams, it becomes a lot easier to enjoy the journey. Even if you do accomplish your dream by yourself, other people hold the key to your personal development (so you can see why doing self-help by yourself or just being alone in general more often than not results in stunted growth).

But you don't always need a dream, sometimes a dream can find you. Instead of reflecting on things too much trying to figure out what to do, see what the world has to offer. Take action. In other words, let life show you the way. Instead of trying to create your plans alone for a big dream you'll probably never do, or that'll leave you empty inside once you get it, take advantage of your current opportunities in the real world (that also means don't be planning to redo your past). Use the moment you have right now. And your opportunities right now in the real world involve people one way or another. And those current opportunities will evolve into big life plans that will give you the fulfillment you are looking for.

(They'll give you fulfillment, or at least be far more likely to give you fulfillment, as you can learn and tweak your plans from what the real world teaches you as you go along unlike those plans you are making in the dark.) It's a much better strategy than getting stuck in your head planning for your fantasy future or wasting all your time alone on a big project that doesn't pan out.

When you plan alone in secret, it's because deep down you're assuming the Universe, God, or whatever you believe in is against you. The Universe really cares about you and wants to help you (at least the vast majority of the people who live in it do). That means you just need to start turning to people for help with your dreams. And if those close to you can't help, or can't help enough, then start turning to other people until you find those who can.

Trust me, the world is an amazing place with amazing possibilities. You just have to start interacting with it, you have to put yourself out there, you have to communicate with people.

And that's the answer you're looking for to get unstuck. That's the secret to accomplishing amazing things. Plan with people, ask them for help with your dreams. Don't try to go it alone.

# **Chasing After Success Will Leave You Miserable**

## **(And How Habits Are Bad News)**

I've sort of already touched on this topic with grit: chasing after success is a recipe for disaster. You should be chasing after better friendships, lovers, and family life. Remember, put the focus on others. You don't want to be that guy or gal who has a well-paying job but no friends or family of your own. Like I said before, you *will* get what you aim for, but it doesn't mean you'll be happy when you get it.

And when it comes to habits is that really what you want to become, a robot? Even if you can take grit and pain out of the equation, you're still chasing after success. With the limited time you have, that means you're giving up other very important things to get it. Don't get me wrong, there is a time for work and there is a time for play. Sometimes you have to buckle down to do what needs to be done. And if you want to space things out, that's fine and a lot of times that's the smart thing to do. But don't let it turn you into a soulless robot, that's no way to live. Remember, all you have is the present moment. Don't waste it. You don't have to prove anything to anyone. Life just needs to be enjoyed. It's not a competition. You just need to start being true to yourself. You need to start enjoying the journey. Besides, like I said, if you are going to chase after something, it's a lot more enjoyable if you do it with others. Ask for help.

And you can't really force habits; they're too ingrained in your psyche. When I tried to force myself to learn a musical instrument, I kept it in my room so I would have a visual cue to play it as advised by those in the self-help world. But I rarely played it even though I tried to each day. And the few times I did, it just made me miserable. My heart wasn't in it. Yet, many years later, we just happened to buy a cheap piano to have in the living room so guests could have fun with it. This time I couldn't stop myself from using it. I busted out all my old music books and kept working

on them. I got surprisingly good. It was just my time to learn, you can't force things.

Habits tend to just naturally happened when you don't try (and it's more enjoyable that way). Let things just come together when it's their time. Don't try to force habits. Don't chase after success. It'll just work when everything is ready.



# Mentors are Just Unnecessary Abuse

If you want to get a mentor, think twice about it changing your life for the better. A mentor needs to care for you to make any difference in your life. They first need to be your friend for them to work because it is really the emotional support that you need from them. But that emotional support can make all the difference in the world. Most of the stuff they are going to teach you are things you already know or can easily figure out on your own. That means in the self-help world mentorships are worthless, but friends who you can turn to are worth their weight in gold. You just have to ask them for their advice. Ask for help.

And if you need an accountability partner, no one will do a better job than your friend. They care enough to make the effort to keep you on track and they will provide the emotional support you need to accomplish your goals.

Something like a sports coach would be different of course. That's skill and knowledge being passed down. Mentoring, however, or what some call life coaching, is often one person talking down to another or just trying to sound smart. No good really comes from that. What you really want is a friend to talk to. You just have to ask them for help. And a friend will lift you up, not pull you down.

# Tips and Tricks will Just Trip You Up

But there are always the tips and tricks that'll allure you to read self-help like that psychological technique that showed this percentage increase in success in this situation. It certainly seems like good stuff to know. But let me warn you, those tricks won't really help as they'll hurt you in the long-run.

I remember interviewing for this impressive, well-known company, and I used all those little tips and tricks I learned on my resume, cover letter, and for my job interview. And the result? They were really impressed. They couldn't wait for me to start... Then I probably turned out to be one of the worst employees they ever had. You can't beat just doing the work. I should have worked on my skills to be a great candidate for the job and then *that* would have shined through in my interview. Besides, it was one of the worst jobs I ever had as the culture there wasn't a fit for me. With all those tips and tricks, I was just manipulating them into thinking I was someone I wasn't. Why not just be yourself? The truth catches up to you eventually and you can always improve any skill by just doing it. There's no need for tricks.

What about using all those tips and tricks on yourself? Then you're just manipulating yourself from not being the person you're supposed to be. And how can you enjoy life if you aren't being who you really are? Again, why not be yourself? It's the only way to really live.

There are no shortcuts; you just have to put in the work. If you want to learn a new skill, just practice it until you get good at it. There is no other way. So don't waste your time reading self-help.

Don't get me wrong, you'll figure out new strategies in life (or tricks if you want to call them that) that work for you, but those have to grow from time and experience. So just focus on taking action and you'll figure out the best path to take. Focus on doing the work. Ultimately, it all has to come from you. Be yourself. Don't be digging in those self-help books for those

little golden nuggets. It's all just fool's gold. You just need to do what needs to be done.

(Personally, I find if you just be yourself (though, oddly enough, you have to work at it, you have to take a lot of action) you naturally do all those tips and tricks without thinking about it but without the karma recoil or the bad taste in your mouth from trying to manipulate others.)

Forget the tips and tricks. Be who you really are.

# Chasing After Happiness is Also a Bad Idea

So you shouldn't chase after success. And just about everyone knows that chasing after happiness is also a foolish endeavor. There's a lot of evidence showing that the people who chase after happiness quickly become miserable.

But now self-help books are coming out saying to not chase after happiness. Then they tell you the trick is to setup your environment to make it more likely you'll be happy. But that's still chasing after happiness...

The main problem with chasing after happiness is that you're still making *yourself* the focus in your life. Remember, you're supposed to put the focus on *others*.

**Instead of chasing after happiness, what you should be doing each day is the right thing.**

Communicate with people, donate your time and money, put in the work to be of value to others, but ask for help when you need it, help out a friend, be a good person, etc.

Our brains are wired to make happiness the reward for doing the right thing. And, trust me, it's not going to let you cheat. So stop turning to self-help looking for tricks to be happy.

And how you get yourself into a good environment that will help to make you happy is by doing the right thing. Doing the right thing will slowly get you to a good, happy environment.

That's because what is really going to make you happy is a sense of community (that's the best environment to have). But you get that sense

of community by helping others, by putting the focus on others, by doing the right thing.

So stop wasting your time reading self-help books to find happiness. Happiness comes from the right action.

So start doing the right actions.

Stop chasing after happiness and make your life about helping others.

### **Focus on making *other* people happy.**

And you do that one person at a time by giving your undivided attention. You can't rush the process. (That's also how you make friends. And making someone into a friend is also a gradual process. But that doesn't mean making friends is hard. Actually, it isn't so much about *making* friends but *finding* friends. You can't make anyone do anything. You don't make opportunities; you find opportunities. You *find* your friends. But even when you find them it just takes time for not only them to trust you but for you to trust them. So just keep putting yourself out there and be friendly, give people your undivided attention.)

Never forget, deep down people just want to be seen and heard. And you have the power to give that.

Give to others. Don't try to make yourself happy. Instead, focus on making other people happy.

(This isn't to say you shouldn't chase after your dreams. Just don't chase after the feeling of happiness. But do live out your dreams. People want to see that. Go after what you want from life. By living up to your full potential, doing what you're good at, what you enjoy, and what you really want from life, you're making society happy. Trust me, it's the best way to serve others.)

# Self-Help is Deadly

Have you ever met someone who was really into self-help who wasn't off? Yet, do you think when you're the one reading self-help you're not the one others are seeing as off? It's because you and the other people out there reading self-help think that there's some type of secret to be found to improve your life, there's not. And you have to be kind of off to think that. Normal people know that self-help is either garbage or, if it is good, it's just common sense or things you've already been taught. So they don't waste their time with it. They just focus on doing the work. They focus on achieving their goals. They focus on taking action. Haven't you already been taught to help others, be social, communicate, be proactive, and be a good person? And what do you think this whole book has been about? The secret is there is no secret.

But the more you read and use self-help the more you're going to think you need it because you aren't going to see any results since you aren't putting in the real work that needs to be done. And when you do see people getting results who don't read self-help (which makes sense since they are not only putting in the real work that needs to be done but they also have more time to do so by not reading self-help), you're just going to get depressed about it. Then you're going to run back to self-help even more or give up altogether. But there's a better option, that's just to live your life. It means getting a life and being with the people you love, not relying on some book to solve your problems. Helping yourself and getting help from others. Just put yourself out there with people and see what works for you.

Don't get stuck in your head, it won't do you any good. It'll just hurt you. **You need to have faith in yourself and in your own abilities to solve your own problems.** That's how life is meant to be lived.

(This doesn't mean you can't talk to people about your problems or that you have to face them alone. But books can't talk back nor can they think about your current circumstances. But people can. Ask for help.)

Besides, every day is a self-improvement day. Every day you learn something new about yourself, the world, or you learn a new strategy to make life better. But that stuff is best learned from your life, from taking action, not from burying your head in books with material that you may never use.

Don't focus on self-improvement. Don't focus on fixing yourself. Instead, **go after what you really want in life.** (And when you do that you should *naturally* do the three steps, which means you probably haven't been going after what you really wanted in life this whole time.)

You might ask, though I've already answered it, "Do I focus on making other people happy or do I focus on going after what I really want in life?" The answer is both. You can juggle more than one ball at a time. And they feed into each other. When you make people happy, they'll be much more likely to help you with your dreams. When you accomplish your dreams, you'll make those closest to you happy.

And what you really want, if you're being honest with yourself, is to connect, help, and be with people. (You could focus entirely on making other people happy. Perhaps that's what your real dream is about.)

Go after your dreams. Help yourself. Don't do the three steps to fix yourself. Do the steps for a better life. Once you stop thinking you need to fix or improve yourself, once you accept yourself as you are, things will start to improve as you'll free up time and energy to do exactly that. Use the three steps to get what you really want from life, not to fix yourself.

Even if you do care about self-improvement, I guarantee, instead of reading self-help looking for new techniques, if you focus on taking action, creating your own systems and ways of thinking from experience, and being with the right people, your results will be far better.

But if you keep reading self-help material, you're reinforcing this idea that you're inadequate, that you need to keep reading self-help, and that makes sure you do keep wasting your time. Getting lost in these thoughts and wasting your limited time on earth with this stuff all alone is what

makes self-help so deadly to living the life you want. It's deadly to your success. It's deadly to your happiness. It's deadly to your social life. And it'll probably leave you feeling dead inside. (That means turning to self-help might have been one of the worst decisions of your life.)

What if the more knowledge you gain through self-help, the more miserable you become? Then really the best thing you can do is to just act, take part of this game called life and stop educating yourself. Trust me, the Universe wants you to figure it out on your own, it wants to teach you directly, it wants you to live your own adventure.

The important thing, and this is rather cliché since all self-help books end on this note, is that you focus on taking action (the right action at least and the right action involves other people). Go see what the Universe has in store for you. Stop with your planning, your reading, and your hiding in your room. Stop trying to outsmart the Universe. You just need to throw yourself into it and let the Universe provide and teach you. It's waiting for you; all you have to do is start.

Let go of self-help so you can start doing what needs to be done. And what needs to be done is to get a life (and following the three steps can help with that).

Don't let self-help pull you down to a situation where you get stuck in your head and you don't take action, where you think you can't figure out your own problems, where you can't enjoy your life.

Stay far away from self-improvement material. Treat self-help like the plague because it is.

Help yourself by letting go of self-help.

Let go of it and be free.





# **Letting Go of Self-Help**

# Why Self-Help?

I don't think many self-help books address why you came to self-help in the first place. Happy people don't read this stuff. So that must mean some type of misery caused you to come here. And, thus, you are trying to fix that misery.

Let's talk about that misery. Most miseries don't come purely from life circumstances but, rather, dysfunction is often the real culprit. Most of the time true misery comes from a dysfunctional reaction to a bad or harsh life circumstance. Bad things happen to everyone. But most people learn to prevent, adapt, and remove themselves from bad situations.

But dysfunctional people have bad life strategies which often cause them to make poor life choices. That is why they end up running to self-help material looking for new techniques to use. While not terrible, those techniques found in self-help books tend to be a poor fit (and, ultimately, a waste of time) for most. (Remember, we're all unique individuals with unique life circumstances. What works for one person probably won't work for you, at least not in the long-run.) But normal, healthy people have their *own* good techniques and life strategies (which they prefer and enjoy compared to everyone else's) created through experience, not through self-help books.

So that raises the question, are normal people just way smarter than the dysfunctional people who turn to self-help? Are they simply able to come up with better life strategies on their own? No, not really. The difference lies in the fact that normal people *talk* to those they trust (and who aren't dysfunctional themselves) about their current problems and opportunities. This review process (though they probably never think about it that way, they just call it talking about their day) gets them to learn about good strategies and techniques for their situation and gets them to throw away the bad ones. And it often gets them to consistently make *good* decisions which add up to a successful, happy life. Ask for help.

Through experience (taking action/helping themselves) and talking to people about their current life situation (communicating/asking for help) they end up way better off in life. And those dysfunctional people who distract themselves from taking action with escapism and who keep to themselves by keeping secrets often find that they are not even close to the life they wanted, even with self-help material. And it's only a matter of time before they end up becoming miserable.

Isolation isn't just the dream killer, it's the person killer. It's the path to a terrible life. It'll destroy your happiness, your success, your relationships, your finances, and your social life. So stop trying to do life by yourself. Stop wasting your time with self-help. Talk to someone about your problems. Go open up to some good people. Go get some help.

But, unfortunately, for those who have been reading self-help for a while, most miseries are pretty entrenched into their lives. In other words, it's not going to be a quick fix. Even though many self-help books have already said that (though they often imply the opposite on their cover and marketing), you're still looking for that quick fix, that secret to transforming your life.

If you have already consumed a lot of self-help, think of an average day in your life. Has self-help really changed your actions in your day-to-day life? Even if it has, have those new actions really changed your life for the better? Probably not. Sure, perhaps you gained new insights while reading it, which made you feel good in the moment, but if it hasn't changed your day-to-day actions *and* your results, you've gained nothing. And where you are today is a culmination of your hard work and your right actions, and nothing else besides your starting circumstances. So if you aren't happy with where you are, get to work doing the right thing. Don't waste your time reading self-help. Instead, go talk to someone about your problems. Focus on action. Focus on getting help from others. Ask for help.

Like I said, a lot of your misery probably came from (actually, I'm pretty certain of it) doing life all by yourself. And self-help, especially if you are looking for new material to consume all the time, is causing you to keep

trying to do life all by yourself. Just let it go and start asking people for help. **Talk to people about your problems.**

I guarantee there's no secret in those self-help books and there's no secret out there no matter where you look. (The only secret in the self-help world is that they want you to get stuck in your head, they want you to think life is harder than it really is, so that way you end up wasting your time, energy, and, ultimately, your money on them.) Everything has already been said before in one shape or another. The "secret" is to actually live your life and get help from others. Help yourself and get some help. (And once you're in good shape, then you can start giving back and your life will get even better.)

Now some of you might have turned to self-help looking for some ultimate truth to the Universe or to the nature of life itself. (Though, if you're being honest with yourself, you're probably looking for something outside yourself to justify your misery.) Unfortunately, there could be no ultimate meaning to the Universe or to life itself; however, *your* life *does* have meaning to it as it is a subjective experience. But how you discover that meaning has to ultimately come from you.

Meaning is something unique to the individual. Thus, the only way to find it isn't through someone else's thoughts but through living your life, through helping yourself.

One other thing to consider, focusing on your misery is what's probably perpetuating your misery. That is, telling yourself that you're broken inside or hopeless is what's causing you to be even more miserable and making it hard to act. (And reading self-help is just reinforcing that.) Instead, if you shift your mindset, you'll do better. Instead of trying to fix yourself, focus on going after what you really want from life. Chase your dreams. But you don't have to be positive about it as everybody says. Actually, you should admit to yourself that you're feeling negative emotions as that'll free up your thoughts and energy to do something about it. Just don't dwell on those negative emotions and don't use them as an excuse. Acknowledge them, be okay with them, and move on. You can't let your emotions dictate your life (so don't be waiting for the positive ones), and often you

have to act in spite of them. Remind yourself of what really motivates you, what you really want from life (like I already suggested, I would add it to your three steps). Bad things will have a tendency to just bounce off of you when you are chasing after your dreams. But the main point is to stop beating yourself up for no reason. If you do that all the time you'll never stop with the self-help. Take action instead. Help yourself and go after what you want from life.

(This book talks a lot about putting the focus on others, but like I said you still have your own dreams, motivations, and feelings. You're a unique individual. Be who you are. Be yourself. Honor yourself. If you don't, it'll drain you. If you do, it'll energize you to better serve others. And, in turn, that'll help you get even more of what you want in life.)

While not a secret, I will say what might be considered a simple fix (definitely not an easy or quick fix though) is to stop thinking bad thoughts. Negative thoughts, considering what might go wrong, that you're feeling bad, or thinking of how you screwed up, aren't always bad for you. But bad/evil thoughts, thinking of harming or hating others, yourself, or just selfish thoughts in general, *will* hurt you as they will lead to actions. They might not lead to the exact actions you imagined, but they will lead to harmful actions and that is when karma (or just how the real world works) eventually gets you (and that's often when you go back to self-help). But you can also think of good thoughts, think of how thankful you are for everything you have, think of how you can give to others, and think of how much you love others, and those thoughts will lead to actions that will almost certainly do you good. And they'll help you get the life you desire. But you always knew those bad thoughts weren't good for you. So stop thinking bad thoughts. Help yourself.

Don't follow evil. All of its promises are just an illusion. Evil will just leave you worse off in the long-run.

We all have evil within us, but it's up to each of us to not let it win. But if evil (your thoughts or otherwise) seems too overwhelming to overcome, just remember all evil comes from dysfunction/immaturity. And all dysfunctions and immaturities can be fixed. You don't defeat evil, you

unravel it. That includes the evil in your own heart. But how you do that is for you to figure out; however, turning to an ally for help is always a good idea when facing true evil. Ask for help.

But you don't have to kill yourself getting the life you want. Letting go of self-help doesn't have to be an epic battle of good versus evil. You don't have to a Zen master to have a good life. And taking action doesn't have to be hard on you. You have to stop being so serious about life and enjoy it (and reading books on how to live your life is probably taking it a little bit too seriously). You'll just burn out doing that. You have to stop caring in a way. You have to stop trying so hard. Once you give up being so serious, you'll find even more energy and ability to go after what you really want.

And if you're feeling really bad or depressed, it's probably best to talk to a friend or a professional about it instead of reading a self-help book. While they might say the same things, talking to someone will probably make you feel better and you'll be more likely to act on the information. Reading a self-help book, though, will most likely just get you stuck in your head. Don't do that to yourself. Ask for help.

# Start Working on Your Problems

If you have problems, then just start working on them. Trust me, you don't need to be reading self-help for that. Just start helping yourself.

No one is going to come fix your problems for you. But the good news is you can improve your life. So start doing exactly that.

If you have a toothache, go see a dentist. If you have back problems, go see a doctor. If you need money for something, go see a loan officer. If you need a friend, start talking to people. And if you don't know what to do with your life, ask someone for advice. Ask for help.

Any problem can be solved, but *you* have to be the one to work on it.

And if the first dentist did a bad job, then find one to redo the work. If that doctor doesn't help, then go see another. If that loan officer is giving you bad rates, go to the next one or look online. If the person you are trying to be friends with is treating you badly, then go spend your time with someone who doesn't. If the person you asked for help gave you no advice or bad advice, then go ask someone else. Don't let little things like that stand in your way.

It's up to you to fix your own life. No book can help you with that.

But don't stress about it. Just start doing it.

Sure, you might not go about it the best way, but it's better than doing nothing at all. And the more time you spend on it, the more you'll figure things out and the sooner you'll fix your problem.

Remember, change is a gradual process, so just more of a reason to start now.

And don't waste your time reading self-help. That's energy and effort you could be using to fix your problem.

Just start working on your problems. Help yourself.



# Real Self-Help

Real self-help is just as the word implies, you help yourself.

You go exercise. You start that business. You make that call. And so on.

But then **reading self-help is the exact *opposite* of self-help**. That is time and energy you could have used to help yourself.

Remember, there is no secret to be found in those self-help books. That means you don't need to be reading them. You just have to put in the work. You just have to help yourself.

And I think most people turn to self-help because the changes they are looking for don't come soon enough. That's understandable.

But when you exercise, it takes months before you see any real results. A business could take years before you start making good money. And real friendships and relationships in general don't happen overnight.

Change takes time. You just have to realize and appreciate that fact of life.

And you do that by putting in the work and having faith that things will get better. And it will if you keep at it.

So stop wasting your time reading self-help and start doing some *real* self-help. Go help yourself.

# You Already Know This Stuff

For goodness sakes, you already know all this stuff. There is nothing new under the sun.

Most of self-help is common sense or stuff you can, or already have, figured out on your own. And things that are somewhat unique (it is better to give than receive, count your blessings, it's not what you know but who you know, etc.) you've already heard of in some form or another.

So why do you keep consuming books that take hours to read that just repeats the same stuff? That's time you could be spending on actually improving your life. If you enjoy reading, then read some novels or educational stuff but not things that will make you think life is harder than it really is, not stuff that will get you stuck in your head.

Again, we're all unique individuals. What one self-help author writes about is what worked for them (or, worst of all, what they think you want to hear). And guess what? They figured it out on their own. Rarely does one self-help book contribute its main idea to another self-help book. So how did that author figure it out on their own? By trying new things, by doing different stuff, by experimenting and experience, not by reading self-help. They applied a little bit of common sense and common knowledge to their life and learned what worked for them. They used their own brain to figure things out. And you can do the same.

You already know this stuff; you just need to start applying it.

**You just need to start doing it.**

(Besides not reading self-help, I know I didn't cover too much about what you *shouldn't* be doing with your life, so you might be tempted to read about those items in a book even though deep down you already know them. But even if we did cover them that's too much information for you to remember. A better strategy is to focus on doing the good things, the

positive things, the three steps, taking action, and you should naturally not do the bad ones.)

# Don't Teach This Stuff

You might be tempted to hold on to self-help so you can teach what you've learned to others. So you can give them knowledge and so they won't have to make mistakes and learn it the hard way like you have. But that motivation is a selfish one.

The real reason you're doing it is to justify your pain in learning it and to say it wasn't all just a waste of time. But it was. You shouldn't be pushing ideas on people. And teaching self-help is pushing your ideas on them. Remember, honor their individuality and personal intelligence. We all need help, but don't assume you know their life and what it needs better than they do.

If you want to give, if you really want to help people, you have to ask them what they need first. Don't assume they need your self-help material or that you know what they need in life. Instead, ask them if they need help and, if they need help, ask them what they need.

And don't forget to honor the individuality in yourself. You're still learning and growing. You're a human being. You still make mistakes. So don't act like a guru (you'll just get more depressed when you screw up). Don't waste your time teaching people what you've learned in life because you're still learning. That's time you could be using to know more about yourself and the world around you. Besides, those you teach won't really know what you're talking about until they learn it from firsthand experience.

You should worry about you. If people ask for help or advice, that's one thing, but you need to be concerned about your *own* life first (like I said, do the three steps in order). And, trust me, when you focus on growing as an individual and doing what you're meant to do, it's often the best way to serve others. Give the gift of being your true yourself to others.

(I'm not saying to not give help to others. It's all about giving in the right way. Which, honestly, can be hard to figure out. But part of it that I'm

certain about is being true to yourself. And if being a teacher isn't who you really are, then don't do it.)

Fix your life first. Be a success *then* you can tell others how you made it.

But you're not a guru at life so don't pretend to be one. And don't tell people you're not a guru and then try to teach them like you are one. It's a waste of your time and theirs. Focus on your *own* journey. Let the real world be your teacher and theirs.

(Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against teaching. It is a wonderful profession that helps people. But what I'm saying is to not teach out of insecurity or the need to feel validated. Be true to yourself.)

Besides pushing your ideas onto people, the big problem with teaching is that you *think* you're taking action. You're not. Don't let it fool you. You'll never improve your life that way. Remember, **action is the only thing that'll save you.**

Besides, there are plenty of people teaching this stuff already. We don't need another book (even another one that tells you to stop reading self-help books). Worry about yourself.

Let other people teach. Your job is to act.

# Be True to Yourself

Probably the fastest way to get rid of this self-help garbage is to just be true to yourself. Don't follow some system or someone's ideas on life. It'll just drain you.

Instead, do what feels right—not what feels pleasurable, necessarily, but what feels right to you. Trust your gut.

Even if the three steps don't feel right to you, then stop doing them (and if you do what feels right, trust me, you'll naturally end up doing the three steps anyway).

I would still suggest you *start* by doing the three steps for a period of time as these new actions will create new feelings in you. And those feelings will help to show you who you truly are. But if you really don't plan on doing the three steps, then at the very least focus on getting out of your house to try new things and talking to new people. Do that enough and you'll start moving towards the things and the people that make you feel good and away from things and people that don't. Life will start to feel right. You'll start to be your true self. Help yourself.

And if you're being true to yourself, you'll admit that you don't want to spend your time alone anymore. You'll admit you want to interact with other people. You'll admit you need more genuine conversation and connection in your life. You'll admit that you want to be with your group. But it's up to you to find them and putting on a mask given by a self-help book will just get in the way. In other words, **just keep putting yourself out there and be yourself**. Help yourself and be true to yourself. Help yourself by being true to yourself. Relax. Don't stress about life. You don't have to be putting on a facade and you don't have to act a certain way around people. Be true to your feelings and you'll figure it all out along the way. That's how life is meant to be played. And that's all you have to do.

(If putting yourself out there isn't working for you, it's because you aren't talking to people. And if you aren't talking to people, then you aren't being

true to yourself. We're social creatures. And if you *are* talking to people and are still stuck it's because you aren't opening up enough about your life and your problems or you aren't opening up to the right people. Ask for help.)

Really all you need to do is to get out of your own way. (And reading, thinking about, or even writing self-help is causing you to get in your own way. And you get out of your own way by just doing what needs to be done, by letting go of self-help, by finally taking action, by doing what your heart has been calling you to do.) You just need to stop overthinking things and just do whatever you've been thinking about. Be true to yourself.

Get out of your own way; stop reading self-help.

**Get out of your own way; just do whatever you've been thinking about.**

There's a disconnect in your mind... between what you want and what you do. And that's why you keep running back to self-help... you're hoping to bridge that gap between fantasy and reality. But that won't work. Only by *acting* on your *thoughts* will you start to connect your mind and fix your life.

The secret isn't to think about what you want.

The secret is to *act* on what you think about.

(But if they're evil thoughts, you're not being true to yourself for in the hearts of all men (and women) is goodness, but some just have theirs buried under a lot of garbage.)

Action will let you know the true nature of reality. Action will tell you who you really are.

It won't be easy, acting on your thoughts, as fear is the chasm between what you want and what you do. But the more you do it the easier it

becomes. Don't think twice about doing it. Don't let fear and indecisiveness hold your back in life.

(But keep in mind, spending time with people will make it more likely you'll bridge those two worlds. So don't be staying in your room alone. And talking to people, especially good people, about your thoughts/plans will make you more likely to act on them. Start being social.)

So stop putting things off by reading self-help.

Nothing will go perfect in life, but you can only really learn and change from doing. Help yourself.

(If you ever find yourself letting your imagination run wild, living in fantasy worlds, or making big plans that you never act on, stop yourself and start acting on those thoughts instead. No matter what kind of thoughts they are you can always act on in some shape or fashion.)

The three steps are just a more detailed plan for those having a hard time figuring things out. (And that's probably because you're trying to do life all alone, which itself is usually a dysfunctional byproduct of reading self-help material. Doing things alone isn't natural/your true self. Remember, isolation is the dream killer. Be a real human being for once—do what feels right—and go be around others. Go interact with the real world.) It all comes down to being true to yourself.

(Even if you are socially awkward from being so isolated, put yourself out there. Like working out a muscle, you'll get better at it the more you do it. You won't notice the change right away, but it will happen if you keep at it.)

A lot of people say who you surround yourself with determines your success more than anything. But you won't find those people, good, helpful people who want to be around you, if you don't keep putting yourself out there and be yourself around people (don't be putting on a self-help mask).



And since you shouldn't have to work on being yourself (being nervous and shy is natural in new situations but that will also naturally go away the more you put yourself out there), it really is all a matter of putting yourself out there.

As Woody Allen and many others have said in a similar fashion, success in life is pretty much all about showing up, it's about putting yourself out there. (That's how most people are successful in life, they just put themselves out there, they just show up to things. They don't waste their time in life reading self-help books. Many describe their successful life as something they fell into it, their job, their friends, etc. But it didn't happen by happenstance. Normal, productive people put themselves out there *and* they talked to other people about their lives. Remember, *talk about your problems* as you'll learn far more from other people than you will any self-help book. Communicate.) And if you put yourself out there and interact with the world, trust me, it'll feel right.

But you can't put yourself out there if you're in your room on the computer. Now it doesn't mean everything you show up to will be a success, but if you put yourself out there enough you'll figure out who you are, what you really like to do, and who you like to spend your time with. You'll find success eventually, but only if you keep putting yourself out there. (Remember, isolation is the dream killer. Don't let yourself be alone.)

Putting yourself out there will help you from getting stuck in your head. Putting yourself out there will help you from being too serious about life. Putting yourself out there will help you find opportunities. Putting yourself out there will help to bridge fantasy to reality. Putting yourself out there will help to push things along.

(Putting yourself out there will help to build your intuition, your gut feeling about things. And that'll help you to make better decisions in life. But to build that intuition, you need life experiences and true life experience comes from *interacting* with others, not just simply going to new places alone. Talk to people.)

So when you get invited to something, go. If someone is going somewhere, tag along. And go to that class, take that cruise, fly to that country, apply for that job—do whatever it is you've been thinking about. You'll never know what will come of it unless you go.

Sure, not everything will be fruitful; but if you keep putting yourself out there you'll eventually find friends, fun, success, and fulfillment. (Your fantasies will start to become a reality.) But you won't find it in those self-help books, videos, podcasts, your daydreams, your secret plans, or whatever is causing you to stay in your room. You have to get out of your room and meet people to find out who you really are.

**Keep putting yourself out there and you'll find who you truly are.**

# How to Change

Face it, you are turning to self-help for some kind of change. And you're probably looking for a quick fix (though I doubt you can admit that to yourself), but life doesn't work out that way. It's a gradual process.

But if you knew that, or at least accepted it, then you wouldn't be turning to self-help or trying to implement some crazy idea. Instead, you would just start doing the work and start using your current resources because you know you have a long road ahead of you, not try to find some hidden idea or strategy in a self-help book.

Doing things all at once doesn't work. You have to do it gradually, very gradually. And what you need to do gradually is the right thing, the three steps, communicate, take action, help others, etc. Basically, all the good stuff you've been taught growing up.

And aiming to change means you probably won't (at least not in the way you want to). Aiming to do the right thing, however, means you probably will.

So don't try to do a big change because you probably won't succeed and it'll leave you worse off. Remember, planning, at least by yourself, is often planning to fail.

Instead, focus on doing the right thing each day. And doing the right thing means being true to yourself. (Believe it or not, it's true. And if you think it isn't, then you've been out of tune with your real feelings for way too long.)

And being your true self means communicating when you need help, being a good person, and connecting to others.

(I'm not against making a big change in your life. We've all heard of people, personally or on the news, who have done it. But they were successful and were able to make a big change because they were being

true to themselves. They didn't do it because they were trying to change themselves. They didn't do it because they were copying someone else. Be true to yourself, do the right thing, and change will naturally come.)

Remember, you can't plan for things by yourself. So planning by yourself for a big change means you're just going to fail at it. You might gain *some* new understanding of yourself, but all you'll really gain is understanding what a mistake it was. You have to take advantage of your opportunities when they present themselves. You can't really make them (all you can do is find them). So when opportunities present themselves, you have to take advantage of them. And you take advantage of them by doing the right thing, by doing the three steps.

In short, you don't know what you don't know. Until you do something, you don't know if it's a good idea or not, if an opportunity exists. So take action and find out. Don't waste your time planning for your big change. Help yourself, get help from others, and see if people want what you have to offer. Again, follow the three steps.

In a way, you have to accept the world for what it is. Remember, you can't make opportunities; you *find* opportunities. If you could make opportunities you would be God. You're not God. When you run to self-help or try to use their strategies you're trying to make opportunities out of thin air. You're rejecting the world. But doing so won't change anything. You're just hurting yourself. Instead, accept the world for what it is and work with it. Play your part, use your relationships, use your gifts, use your feelings, be true to yourself, and enjoy and embrace the life you have.

You can't control what happens to you but you can control how you respond.

Life is all about responding to it. Life is meant to be engaged, not studied. Life is meant to be learned from, not read about. Do what is best for yourself in the moment. Interact with life. Help yourself. Self-help escapism will just get in the way of that. Follow the three steps instead.

Start doing the right thing in your current situation, don't fight it. Your life depends on you doing the right thing. Like a plant in the sun, if you water it daily, it'll start to flourish. If not, it'll dry up and die.

But even after you accept the world as it is, it's a slow process to change your life for the better. You might think you're an independent person, but, whether you like it or not, you depend entirely on your relationships. You have roots established where you live. If you want to grow as a person, you need new roots or to deepen your existing ones. But like any plant, it takes time to grow. Changing your life isn't going to come from the flip of a switch. So change isn't going to come from one big move or executing some master plan. Instead, start where you are. Begin today. If you want a better life you have to lay down new roots or improve the ones you have. And you do that by doing the right thing. And the three steps can help with that.

(Unfortunately, that means giving up self-help will probably be a gradual process for you as well. But keep at it. Focus on taking action instead. Catch yourself when you're about to read some self-help and replace it with helping yourself and asking for help. Focus on doing the three steps.)

Just start doing the three steps. And be patient. Patience is a virtue. I know it's hard but good things really do come to those who wait.

The overall point is if you plan on doing something crazy to improve or fix yourself: don't!

Real change, or at the very least *good* change, can only really come gradually (now there might be a build up to a major event, but the process to get there is still a gradual one). And you slowly get there by doing the right thing, by thinking the right thoughts, and by working with the right people.

Don't underestimate people when it comes to having a better life. They are the roots that let your plant (your life) grow and without them you will die.

## **Stop spending all your time alone.**

But if you are going to do something crazy, if you're going to make some big change in your life, do it as a group. Take your roots with you. Don't go it alone. Ask for help.

Still, it's a gradual process to get what you want. And you get there by being true to yourself, by doing the right thing, by doing the three steps.

And if you focus on that, if you focus on your relationships, then one day change and happiness will suddenly be there.

But, of course, change takes action; it's the only way to get there.

So don't sit on your ideas (your thoughts). Sitting on your ideas is the worst thing you can do. Always best to try out your idea and let the real world teach you what you need to know, not create a fantasy world around your ideas. You don't sit on your ideas; you act on your ideas.

But action can be a funny thing. Action is the most important thing in life, but we always find ways or excuses to put it off. What you need is motivation to take action. Sure, you have to start by motivating yourself. You can't be wasting your time waiting for or searching for motivation. But real motivation always starts within, like striking a match within yourself. Remember, your burning desire must be found within as you are a unique individual. But to have a roaring fire you need some outside fuel, you need to add some wood to that match.

To take a good amount, a healthy amount, of action, you need emotion (that's the fuel that motivates you to take action).

Actions themselves do release emotions which will allow you to take more action (so better to help yourself/act than to think about things or to wait to be in the mood). But simply taking action gives diminishing returns when it comes to emotions.

Best to get an unlimited amount of emotional fuel, like the near-infinite energy from the burning sun used by plants, to supply your actions. And that fuel for you is other people.

It could be the beauty or love of a man or woman. It could be the peer pressure of, or the fun of being with, your friends. It could even be the hatred of, or wanting to impress, someone you have to see in person. Whatever it is, the people in your life are your strongest motivator and creator of emotional fuel. (And interacting with them on an electronic device is a poor substitute for the stimulation found from interacting with them in person.)

We're social creatures; start acting like it.

Put the focus on others. Put yourself out there. **Get involved in your community.**

I guarantee that'll give way to change.

If you're not a student and you don't have a job, then get one. (Just choose one that feels right to you with the right people.) (And if you're a student, join a few clubs on campus. Even if you've done that before, don't give up on finding one that clicks.) Even a minimal paying, part-time one is better than nothing. (And if you're having a hard time finding a job, tell the people closest to you that you're looking for one. You'll be surprised how much they can help. But they can't help if they don't know. Ask for help.) Besides, earned money is a good, but not an absolute, measure of how much value you are providing to society. Thus, earning some money with a part-time job is often better than earning no money in your room. Plus, a job forces you to take action almost daily. So it helps to put you in an active state in life instead of a passive one like when you watch TV.

And when you get more experience (you work) and you choose to experiment in life (you try different jobs), you'll eventually find a job that not only pays more but fulfills you more, that makes you happy. And that helps to break you out of learned helplessness.

(And if you want to be self-employed, chances are if you can't do it on the side while working on your full-time job, you won't be able to do it as your main job, you don't have the discipline yet. So start with a paying job first, especially one that'll teach you about the job you want while self-employed, and do your own job on the side until you can slowly transition. If not, you might get stuck in a routine where you aren't earning any real money with it and are relying on welfare or your parents to pay your bills, where you aren't providing any real value to society. Don't do that to yourself. People won't respect you. Help yourself.)

But it all starts with that first job, even a part-time one. It all starts with you getting out of your room. So start with a low paying job, at least you know you *are* adding value to society, and work your way up from there. And at the very least it will get you out of your room and into the real world. Trust me, you'll feel better about yourself. You'll get to know people in your community instead of just staying on your computer. And the more involved you get with your community the sooner you'll move up in life.

I know you want to be self-employed; you want to be your own boss. But the only successful people I've seen do that transition from a full-time job first. To be successful in a self-employed job, you have to know not only what people's desires/demands are, but you also have to find them and convince them you can provide what they are looking for. And this knowledge isn't easy to come by. (And often you still can't do that entirely alone. In other words, you need a team. But no one will partner with or work under you until you first have a proven track record.) With rare exception, most learn it from a full-time job in that area. *Then* they take that knowledge (and possibly clients) to their own job (or, at the very least, take their skill set they learned from that job to applicable work in self-employment, though this is less common as it is harder to pull off since you don't have that deep knowledge of that particular industry like where to find and keep clients). There are exceptions, but it is so rare it would be silly to think you fall into this group.

Remember how I said to let the world teach you what to give? Well, it's already telling you what it wants by all the jobs that need to be filled. Now you just need to figure out which job you can give the best at. And you do



that by experience and experimenting. You experiment by working different jobs. And once you find one that best suits your personality and gain enough experience in it, *then* you can go work for yourself.

Even if you plan on doing sales on your own where you actively reaching out to people to find that demand, it's still best to work under someone first and *then* go work on your own. And if you plan on doing some internet work to avoid the normal workforce, it's still best to work under someone who is really good at it first and *then* work on your own. You want that deep knowledge, skill set, confidence, and even relationships before you venture off.

Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of people who did it entirely on their own. But they are a rather tiny, microscopic group compared to all the failures out there who had to give up. And to think that you belong to that rare group is a little foolish. Even if you do belong to that rare group who can do it, you are *still* better off working under someone first (as you'll move further fast and be more likely to be successful) and *then* go work for yourself.

And your job doesn't have to have anything to do with your dream. It can be a means to an end. But pursue your dream (not your fantasy worlds) on your off time. You can, if it is advantageous to you, eventually make your job or self-employment about your dream. But for now just get a job, *then* you can do your money making dream. Besides, remember that focusing on others will help you with your dreams more than anything else. Get a job.

Bottom line is you need to work for someone first before you can earn the right to work for yourself (at least it is healthier to think of it that way). Humble yourself and work for someone else. And if you don't like the industry, work environment, the people in it, or have an abusive boss, quit (help yourself) and then find another job (again, help yourself... stop avoiding things). But don't try to do some type of "self-employment" to run away from work and the real world. Remember, you *earn* self-employment from the knowledge, skills, confidence, and relationships you get from working under someone else. Don't try to skip this step or you'll

not only probably fail but make yourself miserable in the process. Help yourself. Get a job. Trust me, you'll feel better about yourself when you do.

Besides, like I said, having a job (even a part-time job) allows you to get to know people in your community.

In summary, your job in life is to, remember, serve others. But you first have to find that demand. The beautiful thing about applying for a job is that you *know* there is a demand for that service or else there wouldn't be a job to apply for. But with self-employment it's hard to find that demand, it's hard to know that you're providing value to society. And society expects you to be a producer before you become a consumer, if not, trust me, people won't like you. People are smarter than you think. (While the money you earn isn't the *absolute* measure of how much value you are providing to society, it is a pretty good measure and the vast majority of people in society will judge you by it.) Imagine working a job you hate with long hours and you see someone taking advantage of the government or their parents to make their way in life. While it's never right to treat people badly, if you put yourself in their shoes you know it would be hard for your emotions to not get the best of you.

So get a job, even a temporary, less-than-ideal, part-time job and then work your way up to a full-time job you'd prefer to have with better pay, and master it until, and if you want to, work for yourself. (And don't be afraid to quit a bad job as well. Just make sure to get a new one right away.) But humble yourself first by working for someone. And while you're doing it you'll know you're adding value to society, you'll be doing your part in serving others. And if you're having a hard time getting one, keep applying. You'll find one eventually.

Remember, change is a gradual process. But you need people's help. And getting a job, or a new one, is a good way to get people into your life, to get the right people into your life, and to give to others. It's a good way to stop spending all your time alone in your room and to start getting to know people in your community.

That is the path to change.

But most important of all, and I saved the best for last, a job will help you find friends. Get a job. Help yourself.

# Relax

Finally, I want you to relax. I know I said a lot in this book, but all you have to do is the three steps. In other words, take action and spend time with your friends.

Don't stress out about changing your life or doing the three steps. (Just don't let yourself forget about the three steps either. And a reminder can take care of that for you.)

The world is still going to be there no matter what you do. No need to rush things. Everything has its time and place. And trying to hurry things along will just hurt your progress.

And if you're in real trouble, go get some help! Other than that, I don't see anything in life worth worrying about. So don't take it so seriously. Relax and have some fun with your life. Go have an adventure.

I can't say it enough, with the three steps you just need to ease into it when doing them. Chill out. Everything is going to be okay.

(And if you can have fun when doing the three steps, even better.)

All you have to do in life is the right thing. And, no, it isn't that hard. Communicate, speak up when something is bothering you, ask for help, think good thoughts, surround yourself with good people, be a good person, remove yourself from toxic situations, don't let your life become boring, don't take yourself so seriously, give to others, help others, etc. But you already know all this stuff. Life isn't that hard (as long as you're doing the right thing). There is no secret formula to worry about. **You just need to start applying some common sense to your life.**

As long as you do the right thing every day, that's all that matters as you'll slowly move closer to the life you desire. But stressing out about it won't help things along. If anything, it'll also hurt your progress.

Remember, life is to be enjoyed. Relax. Ease into the three steps, start doing the right thing.

# It's Time to Get Naked!

Ever been to a nudist beach? Unless you want to find photos of yourself without any clothes on, I would suggest not doing it. But it is quite the experience, especially the first time. While it feels unfamiliar in the beginning, when you start walking on the shore with the sun warming your body it just feels so good and natural like we're supposed to be like this.

Next time you're at the library or a bookstore and you see the self-help section, I dare you to walk by it without opening a book. I dare you to walk around "naked." It's going to feel weird at first. You might get an itch to put on your "clothes." But don't give in because it's going to start to feel natural, it'll start to feel right, because this is how you were meant to be.

Stop distracting yourself with self-help material and start being true to yourself.

There is nothing there you don't already know, and there is nothing there that is going to help you. You need to start relying on yourself to take the right action. **You just need to help yourself and get the help of a friend.** A book will just get in the way of that. So don't give in.

The same goes for anything you find online. Instead of giving in and clicking that link, tell yourself, "This material will just get in my way. I just need to do what needs to be done." And do it.

Perhaps you think this is too extreme, but would you harass an alcoholic for having a not-even-one drink policy? Of course not. What about a person who wants to be healthy using that same policy? I don't know about you, but I wouldn't hold it against them. Chances are if you decided to read this book, you need that same policy.

So I dare you to walk around naked (walk pass that self-help aisle of the bookstore).

And when you start walking around without self-help ideas clouding your head, you'll realize you have more time and energy to be yourself, to do the things you want to do, to be who you were meant to be.

# Don't Be Alone

I hate to tell you this since you are almost done reading the book, but the three steps probably *won't* work for you. If you're the type to read this book in the first place, then you will either not try the three steps and reading another book or you'll make yourself miserable doing the three steps. Like all the other self-help garbage you tried, you'll follow the system for a few days or maybe even a few weeks, but then you'll either won't try it out or you'll make yourself miserable doing it. You'll get burned out and then try some other self-help garbage found in another book. But that's okay...

Relax.

I don't want you to *follow* the three steps; I want you to *do* the three steps.

Remember how I said most people naturally do the three steps without realizing it by being with others? Remember how I said most of your problems came from trying to do life by yourself? The more time you spend with others the more likely you'll do the three steps and thus be successful in life.

(And if your problems didn't come from not being social enough, then you either need to start forcing yourself to do the three steps or seek professional help. Probably both.)

When you're with people, they'll put peer pressure on you to take action in life, to help yourself. When you're with people, you'll be more likely to ask for help when you need it. When you're with people, you'll be more likely to put the focus on them and give to them.

But when you spend your time alone, you'll be more likely to spin your wheels, you'll be more likely to get lost in your thoughts, you'll be more likely to live in your own little world instead of the real world. Don't do that to yourself. **Be social.** Put yourself out there.



But when you're social, you might have to make a conscious effort to apply the three steps. Yes, you should naturally be more likely to do the three steps by being social. But if you're been antisocial for a while then you probably need a little push from yourself to start taking advantage of social situations, to start doing the three steps. And a written reminder that you see often can help you with that.

And when you're with people, remember to put the focus on others. Put the focus on their wants and desires. But when you're with people, also be willing to speak up about what is bothering you. Make sure everyone's problems and desires are out on the table. I guarantee a lack of communication is at the root of all your problems. And you can't give your best to others, you can't serve your community the best, if you're stuck with or ignoring problems of your own. Plus, this way you don't get stuck in your head. Don't just sit in the corner. Speak up. And if you keep at it, you'll get there, it'll become second nature.

So if the thing that's most likely to get you to *do* the three steps is being social (and being social has a ton of other benefits for your physical and mental health, your career success, your happiness, and probably a lot of other things not mentioned here), taken to its logical conclusion you should maximize the amount of time you spend with people each day and **minimize the amount of time you spend alone** each day. Put yourself out there.

When you do your work, do it with other people. When you eat, do it with people. When you do your fun activities, do it with people. Heck, I wouldn't even sleep alone if that's possible. Sure, we all need our alone time, but that should be the occasional exception to the rule, not the rule itself.

So how do you start?

Start small; start where you are.

**Leave your door open.**

Real change, at least good, healthy change, has to happen organically and slowly. And the best way to do that is to start with where you live. Leave your door open.

Stop reading self-help articles and just leave your door open. Let the real world in. I think you'll be amazed at the results.

You can hide from the real world, but it'll get you sooner or later and you won't like it when it does. Or you can start letting the real world in now. Help yourself. Will you get hurt from time to time? Sure, but you'll grow from it and become stronger. But if you wait for the real world to come and get you, you might never recover.

I know I already used my "if there is one thing you take away from this book let it be this..." statement already (pretty much once for each of the three steps) but change has to start small as it allows you to be consistent and consistency will get you results. And I think leaving your door open is a good, easy place for you to start.

If you live in a dormitory, leave your door open when you're in your room. If you live with your family, leave your bedroom door open while you're there. (You can even leave it open while you sleep.) If you live in an apartment all by yourself... leave your front door open (if weather permits it). What do you need your door closed for? Open your door and let the light in. It'll only do you some good. (Besides, the darkness and secrets will only hurt you in the end.)

(Live in a home all alone? Sit outside and say hi to people. Live in a home all alone but out in the middle of nowhere? Invite your closest neighbors to come over or you can move closer to civilization. It's important to be with people. There's a reason why suicide rates are higher in remote areas, even with less harassment and beautiful scenery. And there's a reason why suicide rates are lower in crowded areas, even with more crime and ugly scenery. We're a social species; don't isolate yourself.)

What would you choose: momentary pleasure and more long-term misery or temporary discomfort and more long-term happiness? Obviously the

latter. But when you choose to stay on your electronics devices or in your fantasies worlds instead of being with people, you're choosing the former. But when you're being social or working on yourself, you're choosing the latter. Instead of watching TV, go have a good conversation with someone. You'll feel a lot better afterwards. Don't be a slave to pleasure. You're better than that. Start working on having a better life. Leave your door open. The sooner you start the sooner you'll start seeing results.

(As far as online communication goes, I do believe something is better than nothing, but try to make your interactions more human. If you never talk to people, start by messaging them. If all you do is text, start calling them. If all you do is call, start meeting them more often in person. Upgrade your life by upgrading your interactions.)

Even better, get the TV and computer *out* of your room. Put it somewhere that you have to be around people. It'll help keep you from wasting your time on it.

And, remember, if you get a job (even a part-time one) it'll get you around people, it'll make you be more social.

—

I want to take an aside to talk about various forms of entertainment and how they are bad for you.

You should really view the time you spend watching TV for your brain/mental health the same as eating cake for your body/physical health. I would say 30 minutes of watching TV is the same as eating a slice of cake. So if you're watching 2-3 hours of TV a day... you can see why your mental health and your life is so messed up. Television trains you to be in a passive state. And that's why you probably don't take action in life as much as you should, that's why you don't help yourself. And be careful with all those online videos nowadays as the computer is becoming just like the television. Even if you only use the internet to read articles, all those ads, including the ones on TV, can't be good for you. Companies don't spend millions on advertisements for no reason.

Besides, even when it comes to reading, it looks like we're not meant for the glow of the computer screen.

However, reading (even printed books) can also be bad for you. (That's one of the main points of this book.)

The problem with reading is that it also puts you in a passive state. The proof is in all the self-help books people read without even using the material or not making proper use of the material they read (worse, and unlike TV, it can brainwash you into *thinking/feeling* that you're being productive with your time). While reading workout books won't fool anyone into thinking they're growing muscles while reading, intellectual and self-help books can have quite the treading water effect on your life.

Even if you do make reading into more of an active exercise (you take notes while you read, you write things down on your to-do list, or you act on the material right away), there is no promise that it'll do you any good. In fact, there is a very good chance it'll do you no good at all and just be a waste of time. Why? Because we are all unique individuals. What works for the author might not work for you (at least not in the long-run). Best to learn on your own through experience and experimenting (help yourself) and to learn from those close to you in a similar situation or who have already gone through what you're going through (ask for help).

Don't get me wrong, reading is clearly better for the brain than television; however, that doesn't mean it is the best use of your time compared to other things (like asking for help or just trying things out). Opportunity cost applies to everything, even reading.

(A job, even a part-time one, or working with or under someone will often teach you more than a book, or even a bunch of books, ever will.)

While the television, online videos, and reading can be great tools to gather knowledge when you need it, don't let your tools become your masters. Don't let these fantasy worlds (online material, television, books, or even yours daydreams) give you solutions, wants, and desires that don't really exist inside you or don't really work out in the real world.

Forget the illusion. Let the real world teach you what it is that you really want, what you should be doing with your life, and try things out to see if they are the answers you are looking for. That's the only way to really learn or to live.

Perhaps you graduated from watching TV all day to reading books all day. That's better. You should be proud of yourself. But now it's time to graduate to taking action all day, to interacting with the real world, to being around people. So stick to interacting with the real world (you can still read books, especially the paper ones... just not the self-help ones, as long as you're also interacting with the real world). Don't make yourself sick with TV and online videos. Don't live entirely in your fantasy worlds.

So don't stay in your room all day long, even if you are reading a book.

—

So open your door and let the real world in.

Open your door and let your community in.

Leaving your door open will also help you to bring the fantasy in your mind into the reality of your world as your fantasy has nowhere to hide anymore. (And that's a very good thing. After all, don't you want to make your fantasies into reality?)

You can choose to stay in your room and rot with your secret plans. Or you can let the light in (let other people into your life) and slowly start to flourish.

When people visit your house, come out and spend time with them. Even if you don't say anything, it'll do you some good. (But do try to add to the conversation.)

And when people invite you to things (which will happen more often if you have your door open), say yes. Sure, there's a chance you won't enjoy it. But nothing is perfect in life; however, the more you put yourself out there

the more likely you'll find what you're looking for. You'll eventually find the right people who will make a difference in your life.

**Spend more time with good people and your life will change for the better.**

The three steps are still important. But they're more of a guide for the socially awkward. So if you aren't getting the results you want in life from being social, now you know why and what to apply. So start with the first step. Help yourself. Leave your door open and start talking to people.

Now you might get the urge to close your door. Don't. Change won't come overnight. Change doesn't happen right away. But keep at it. Keep your door open and you will see results.

Remember, patience. Good things will come in time.

Leave your door open.



# Conclusion

Before I give the conclusion, let me give you a slightly different way to view things in this book.

I did promise I wouldn't talk about religion again, but here is my own personal (spiritual) belief. All is one.

That means, helping another is no different than helping yourself. Helping yourself is no different than helping another.

This way of living can be hard to wrap your head around. But it can be done if you practice it (by helping yourself and helping others, by loving yourself and loving others).

But what about evil?

By this logic, should you cut evil some slack? You could argue if you don't cut evil down it will surely cut down another. But all is one. Cutting down evil is no different than cutting down yourself.

The difference between good and evil is what will last and what will not. The difference between good and evil is those who are suffering and those who are not. Do not add to another person's suffering. Let nature take its course and you show yourself kindness.

The Universe and love will take care of things.

So all that really matters in life is love.

That's all there really is, to love and be loved, to receive unconditionally and give unconditionally. But you have to make that decision to start loving unconditionally, you have to help yourself.



So I said all you really need in life is to help yourself, ask for help, and give help to others.

Another way to view it is to love yourself (do the actions that will benefit you) and love others (go interact with and help them because that's the thing that really makes them happy).

Friends are really the only thing you've been missing in your life.

You don't need self-help when you have friends.

And friendship is all about love: unconditional acceptance, unconditional giving and receiving, and caring for each other.

Love yourself and love others. Take care of yourself, but put your attention on your friend's happiness, not yours, because that's how the world was designed to work.

If there is one thing I want you to take away from this book it's this (this one being the real one)...

Don't focus on self-help; focus on helping others.

(Focus on others... I would even add that to your piece of paper with the three steps. Since we're at the end of the book, let's go over your reminder. It doesn't have to be a piece of paper; it just has to be something you'll see every day. At the very top it should have your big dream in life, then the three steps, and, finally, a reminder at the bottom to focus on/spend time with others.)

Because when you love people, that's what you do.

You only ask for help because it helps others. People want to see you make your dreams come true. It makes them happy to help you, they love doing it.

But like I said, putting the focus on others, loving others, is a skill that must be developed. But you only develop that skill, like any skill out there, by doing it (or at least trying to do it) again and again, by helping yourself.

You could say life is all about doing what needs to be done and making friends. And what needs to be done is for you to make (find) some friends. Remember, **taking action and being with the right people is all that really matters in life.** Loving others and being around the ones you love, that's all that matters in life. Anything else is just a distraction. And distractions will end up hurting you.

And if there is really one good thing to take away from self-help material (besides taking action) it's the importance of others. But doesn't that contradict the entire premise of self-help as the actions you should be taking shouldn't be about yourself but, rather, about others?

Like I've said before, the real secret you'll find in self-help is there is no secret, so don't bother reading self-help. Instead, live your life and be a good person as everyone has been telling you to do this whole time.

But how you be a good person, how you help others, how you find friends, how you show the world your love, how you live your life is really up to you to figure out on your own as you're a unique individual. And you figure it out by taking action.

So don't fool yourself into thinking there is some self-help book or system that has the secret answer. Reading self-help will just get you lost in your thoughts. It will get you stuck in your head. And doing some weird self-help system will keep you from being yourself. (Again, the three steps aren't so much a system as they are a friendly reminder to be proactive and social in life. But, hopefully, you'll get to the point where you don't even need the three steps anymore as a reminder to put the focus on others.) Throw away the garbage that is self-help. **Stop reading self-help.** Just focus on doing what needs to be done.

(Please, I'm begging you. Stop reading self-help. And don't do it for yourself. Do it for those around you who need you to start being who you were meant to be.)

Start by helping yourself (getting out of your room), then ask people for help (being around people isn't enough, you need to *communicate*, let go of your ego and ask), and, finally, start giving back (because that's what you do for the people you love).

But you have to do all three or else you'll get stuck in your head, stuck in life, or stuck with an empty feeling inside.

And don't wait for when you have inspiration or when you feel good and don't read self-help hoping to find it. Don't wait for that perfect moment. Just focus on taking action. Focus on loving others. The more you put yourself out there the sooner you're going to learn who you're supposed to be.

Don't get me wrong. Things aren't going to be easy now that you have read this book, now that you know the steps, now that you know the truth. Working with the truth is the only way to really understand it. So don't be running back to this book or other self-help books when things go wrong, you make a mistake, or you get your feelings hurt. That's life. That's part of the learning process. The trick, and the only thing that really works in life, is to keep trying as you'll get better. But if you keep retreating, you'll just lose what momentum you've gained and you'll never really improve your life.

Sure, you'll have bad experiences, feel bad emotions, come across bad people, or just feel sad or frustrated at times. But don't run back to self-help. You need to put yourself out there and figure things out for yourself. And you'll discover that all you really need to do is to find the courage to take the right action in life. Help yourself. Ask for help. Give help to others. Or to stop doing the action is causing those bad things to happen. Action, not reading, is the answer. Help yourself.

Make sure to stay on track. Put the focus on/act in regards to other people. (They can often be the motivation you need to stop doing your bad habits in life and to start doing the rights ones.) You can view it as working on creating long-term relationships, learning how to trust people again, facing your fears, being with those you love, loving the world, communicating with others, being social, putting yourself out there, showing up, being around good people, not letting yourself be isolated, or whatever. The important thing is that you keep the focus on others. Keep a reminder close to you (the three steps or whatever you come up with). And make sure you look at it every single day. Don't forget about it being in your wallet or your purse. Make an extra copy and keep it where you know you'll see it often. Use it to start shaping the new actions you're going to be taking in your new life.

And don't stress about the three steps. All you have to do is focus on doing them when you can, focus on others. Don't worry about doing them perfectly. And don't worry about the results. They'll take care of themselves if you put in the work, if you do the three steps. All you have to focus on is making them a part of your life.

**And don't reread this book.** Please don't let it also get you sucked up into your own little self-help world. It's too much stuff to remember anyway, so it won't do you any good to reread it. But the three steps are easy to remember and they'll give you exactly what you want from life. Help yourself, ask for help, and give help to others. **Just focus on using the three steps.** Focus on being with people. Taking action is the only thing that'll save you. Besides, you'll internalize and learn on your own everything said in this book through firsthand experience by using the three steps, so don't worry about remembering what was said in it. Just focus on taking action. Just focus on doing, or even *trying* to do, the three steps. Focus on connecting with others. Focus on being true to yourself. You'll get it sooner or later if you keep at it. And the best part is you'll find your own way in life without a self-help book holding your hand.

There's nothing else to learn. There's nothing else to know.

You just need to get out of your own way. You need to stop reading self-help and start doing.

It's time to go beyond self-help. It's time to start being honest with yourself. It's time to start engaging with the real world. It's time to let go of fear and start walking around naked as the person you're supposed to be.

And love is who you've always been.

It's time to connect.

Stop telling yourself you're broken inside and that you need to be fixed or that you need to improve yourself before you're worthy of love.

You don't need self-help; you just need to start helping yourself.

You just need to start engaging with the real world and stop escaping to the world of self-help. That's how you learn who you really are.

It doesn't matter how many books or articles you read. You can't experience life unless *you* experience it. You can't change your life unless *you* change it. You can't live your life unless *you* live it.

Put down the self-help. Books are no substitute for people or living the adventure called life.

But you can start small. Leave your door open when you're in your room and start talking to the people who come by. It'll add up!

It's time to take responsibility for your life. It's time to forget the self-improvement and go after what you really want. It's time to start living the life you've always wanted instead of just reading about it.

And what you want is connection. What you want are people who will accept you as you are, faults included. That's what unconditional love is. But you first have to make that choice to live in the real world.

And it all starts with you putting down those self-help books.

The world can be an incredible place. All you have to do is begin.

Love and be loved. Love yourself and love others.

Loving yourself means letting go of what isn't good for you. Loving people means putting them first.

Follow this path and I guarantee your life will change for the better.

Let that be your final self-help advice.

And let this be your last self-help book.

Now tell yourself, "I'm done with self-help. Now I'm going to start living my life. And when I do need help I'm just going to ask for it instead. But now I'm going to start living my life for others."

*Help yourself*  
*Ask for help*  
*Give help to others*









*Stop spending all your time alone!*  
*Open your door and go find your friends.*  
*Help yourself.*

To Adult Children: How to Break Your Codependency with Your Narcissistic Parents

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### **Abstract**

In an attempt to give treatment advice to codependent adult children (CACs), terms, academic literature, collective thoughts, and the relationship with narcissistic parents are explored. It appears that controlling and manipulative parents, a child's lack of asking for help outside the dysfunctional family, and a lack of properly reflecting on one's life are what led some to become codependent adult children. These behaviors would suggest that the CAC needs to address the codependent relationship by working on themselves first. Furthermore, this arrested development could be seen as a type of learned helplessness that could be broken away from by increasing the frequency of rewards when the adult child explores life outside the codependent relationship. Social interactions could provide this reward with talk therapy probably being the easiest way to ensure frequency and reward. The guidelines provided for Cognitive Behavior Therapy, successful treatments for *hikikomori* (extremely codependent adult children), and a successful treatment in internet addiction suggest 8 to 12 weekly sessions of talk therapy that gives the CAC space to reflect on their life story and true desires without judgment from the therapist could heal them of their dysfunctional personality or at least have them start to initiate and want to initiate the right actions to break them of their codependency with their narcissistic parents.

*Keywords:* Adult children, Codependent, Narcissistic parent, Hikikomori, Psychotherapy, Talk therapy, Reflective Listening, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Carl Rogers, Stephen Covey

### **Main Body**

To give analysis and clarity, I'll be relying on academic literature and the collective thoughts (even if such collective thoughts cite academic literature at times) in regard to adult children, codependency, narcissistic parents, and other terms. For collective thoughts (or at least popular thoughts on the issue), I'll be relying on *Wikipedia*, *Urban Dictionary*, and *Reddit*. In *Wikipedia*, the articles are constantly being edited and those edits are being reviewed, challenged, and changed by a large number of people. This suggests that the most current version of the writings would most likely represent the collective thoughts on the topics. *Urban Dictionary* and *Reddit* rely on up voting by a mass of people. That would imply that the one with the most upvotes is the best representation of the collective opinion out there. (Unfortunately, many of the *Reddit* forums I expected to find material had little. These included: r/Codependency, r/AdultChildren, and r/ACOA.)

### **Terms**

"Adult Child" is a term that pretty much defines itself: a grownup who doesn't want to grow up. However, given it is an emerging term from our culture perhaps a consensus on the definition is more appropriate. According to the most up voted definition on *Urban Dictionary*, an adult child is someone 25 years or older who doesn't have any interest in joining the real world. They often live at home for little or no rent, free of any real responsibility. Given the harsh, cold, and even cruel definitions often found on *Urban Dictionary*, it surprisingly goes on to have some sympathy by saying that they are not necessarily bad people and are often the product of how they were raised. However, it then goes on to write them off by saying that they'll probably never find a mate (or have a dysfunctional one if they do), are lazy, will have depression, will be obese, smell, implies that they'll never have a job, and states that they'll probably live at home until they're 50 ("Adult Child," n.d.).

Given that even *Urban Dictionary* puts at least some blame on the parents (or on those that raised the individual), it might be of interest to see the definition given by an institution designed to

handle such situations. Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families (ACOA) is an organization that treats “adult children of alcoholics, codependents, and addicts of various sorts.” According to ACOA, “[t]he term ‘adult child’ is used to describe adults who grew up in alcoholic or dysfunctional homes and who exhibit identifiable traits that reveal past abuse or neglect.” The organization’s definition and its own name seem to imply that dysfunctional parents without alcohol use are just as bad as alcoholic ones and that these parents are at least somewhat to blame for and might have a direct correlation with adult children. Furthermore, they seem to imply that adult children are linked to codependent relationships.

“Codependency” has a grassroots origin as well. However, it appears to be more accepted by the academic literature. It started out as describing alcoholics who were dependent on others to enable their behavior. However, it has grown to a broader but still controversial definition of those in a dysfunctional relationship where one person supports or enables another person’s addiction, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement (“Codependency,” n.d.). While the term codependency describes the relationship, it isn’t entirely clear who the codependent is. Is it the person with the addiction and/or immaturity or the person who enables them? Looking at the prefix, “co” means to go together or complement each other. The term “coed” means both sexes as they complement each other in creating life. “Cooperate” means to operate together with someone. “Correlate” means items have some type of link to each other. So the term “codependents” would suggest their dependence or dysfunction complements and are linked to the other’s. Thus, in codependency, both the enabling adult and the dysfunctional adult child should be considered codependents. They are just different types of codependents in a codependent relationship, just as in coed sports and coed dorms you have both male and female.

(While many might know that the plural term of coed often refers to female students, it seems to have come out of laziness and lack of understanding of the word. When Universities started to become coed, people thought that the definition meant “allows females” and not the proper definition of “mixed sexes.” Thus, they started to call female students coeds for short.)

So, clearly, the adult child is a codependent. But the parent can also be called a codependent. As such, I'll refer to these adult children for clarity of terms the codependent adult child or “CAC” for short. Still, both origin terms of CAC (adult child and codependent) suggests the need for a dysfunctional other or some type of enabling figure while the individual is emerging into adulthood.

One such dysfunctional figure could be the narcissistic parent. They are defined as parents that are “exclusively and possessively close to their children and may be especially envious of, and threatened by, their child’s growing independence” and that the child would be “considered to exist solely to fulfill the parent’s wishes and needs.” They are even described as seeing the child as their puppet which they control with emotional abuse (“Narcissistic parent,” n.d.). The definition suggests that they would never allow their children, even their adult children, to truly grow up and achieve independence as it would be a threat to their control over them.

The term “narcissistic parent” comes from the term “narcissistic personality disorder” (NPD). NPD is characterized by exaggerated feelings of self-importance, lack of empathy, spending much of their time worried about their appearance, and often taking advantage of the people around them (“Narcissistic personality disorder,” n.d.).

Such definitions of narcissism hints that the narcissistic parent would not only try to control their child for their own ends but do so discretely as to avoid being labeled as a narcissistic (bad) parent. Academic literature on the subject states that the child is a reflection of them and that reflection better be perfect. “[T]he narcissist does not exist without a reflection—and that reflection better be flawless [...]



The parent's emotional needs are met by appearing perfect; they will spend their lives striving for superiority in order to mask their deep feelings of inferiority" (McLarnan, n.d.). Again, since the parent's reputation better be perfect as well, it suggests that all manipulation done by the narcissistic parent will always be done so that others, perhaps even the adult child, may never know. "A true narcissist stays off the radar; in fact they are model citizens [...]" (McLarnan, n.d.). Such manipulative actions towards the child's life, especially discretely, might cause them to stop developing properly.

That brings us to our last term "arrested development." Though, it has been rejected by the medical community in favor of "developmental disorder." Yet, this other term seems to consist mostly of genetic disorders. Arrested development, however, seems to imply an environmental cause. I think the TV show *Arrested Development* would best give the collective's thought on the term (even all of Urban Dictionary's definitions only talked about the television show). The show is about a rich family, but the parents are manipulative, controlling, and emotionally abusive towards their children. They are clearly narcissistic parents. And all the children seem to have suffered developmentally from it. Either they too became a narcissist or became overly dependent on and attached to their parents. They all seem to be in different states of arrested development. They all stopped maturing before becoming true adults. Thus, we can describe arrested development as mental development that stops short of complete maturity or shoots off into some type of dysfunctional personality type. Given this understanding of the term, it would be fitting to say all codependent adult children are in some type of arrested development.

The main character of the show and one of the sons of the narcissistic parents seems to be the most normal of them all. He is referred to by reviewers as the straight man as he tries to do the right thing, though he too has dysfunctional behaviors like trying to subtly control his son, not taking into account his son's emotions, and having a lack of boundaries with him ("Michael Bluth," n.d.a). However,

the main character's dysfunctional behaviors are nowhere near the level of the other characters. And, his character is the only one to have suffered a great and prolonged loss emotionally. His wife passed away before the start of the show but not before having to watch her be in a coma for several months ("Michael Bluth," n.d.b). Though the main character was described as hardworking and honest even when young, it seems like the writers intuitively knew there had to be some type of growth process, especially a painful one, that caused him to reflect on his life to justify his different personality and maturity on the show compared to his sibling's extreme dysfunction and codependency.

But in the real world does such a clear link between narcissistic parental and codependency exist?

### **Link**

While the terms of codependency, adult children, and narcissistic parents, are pretty well defined and accepted by the masses, is there a link between them? The collective thoughts on Wikipedia suggest that there is. In the 'Children of narcissists' subsection of 'Narcissistic parent' wiki page, it describes the adult child: due to the manipulation of the narcissistic parent, the child's feelings are repressed locking them into arrested development and making them codependent ("Narcissistic parent," n.d.). While the editors of Wikipedia seem to be in agreement with this at the moment, they only cite pretty much one source. And that source comes from one article from the personal website of an educational doctorate. Many other experts who write about it do so as if it is a matter of fact. While the experts out there seem to be in agreement, does the academic literature support the link between the narcissistic parent and CACs?

Indeed, studies show that narcissistic parents (at least the behaviors expected to come from a narcissistic parent) are linked to codependent children. A review of the academic literature showed that codependent children seem to come from parental coercion, maternal compulsion, dysfunctional

parenting, repressive family atmosphere, physical and verbal abuses, authoritarian parenting style, lack of communication, and enmeshment (lack of clear boundaries and family roles) (Cullen & Carr, 1999).

Interestingly, the study showed there was a lack of correlation between codependency and major traumatic childhood experiences or drug or alcohol abuse with parents. Thus, the evidence suggests that codependent adult children seem to be exclusively, or at least mostly, linked to parental manipulation and control, especially if done abusively but not to the point of causing major traumatic events. This agrees with the prior definitions as a major traumatic event wouldn't only look bad on the parent but might motivate the child to do something about the situation and claim their independence, what the narcissistic parent fears the most.

However, not every child of a narcissistic parent becomes a codependent adult child. This would suggest some type of behavior or personality dysfunctionality on part of the child to finish establishing the codependent relationship. While no academic paper I know of explores this aspect, the study above suggested a link of children who tend to avoid seeking help and codependency. This would be an excellent explanation of why some children become victims of the narcissistic parent and some don't. The child growing up would lack resources to escape the control of their parents unless they got help from an outside source and the sooner they escaped the less likely would they be under the growing emotional bondage and manipulative ideas of their parents.

But, overall, there appears to be a clear link between narcissistic parents and codependent adult children.

### **Breaking Codependency**

Stephen Covey, the author of probably the most popular self-help book of all time, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, stated the importance of moving from *dependence* to *independence* and finally to *interdependence*. He also states that one must first move from dependence to

independence *before* moving to interdependence (synergy and maturity with those around you). And independence is something not allowed as when the child “begins to develop a unique, and separate identity, their opinions, and healthy need for individuation causes the [narcissistic] parent to feel threatened, and rejected” (McLarnan, n.d.). The CAC will never be granted real independence and never be allowed to be a fully functioning adult. Thus, they will never experience their true selves until they can break away from this dysfunctional relationship. Breaking the bond and self-reliance is the only way to move out of arrested development. To do this, Covey states that one must work from the inside-out. The three habits that help one move from dependence to independence, inside work, are to *Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, and Put First Things First*.

By not addressing his or her current dysfunctional situation living with their parents at such a late age, the CACs will probably end up doing busy work and/or entertaining activities which blind him or her from knowing what needs to be done to break away from the situation. By not knowing what they want from life, they cannot prioritize it, and, thus, cannot be proactive about it. Instead, one just stays at home doing essentially nothing. Covey’s suggestion that you must do the inner work to move to independence seems to be in alignment with codependent adult children staying dependent. Later in his life, Covey wrote that taking on an outside problem (like your relationship with your narcissistic parents) appears to be the best way to start on the inside-out work. In other words, by analyzing what you can do about the problem on your side it provides the best opportunity for you to reflect on your own behaviors that allowed it and how you can now stop it. Thus, your dysfunctional parents might be the perfect opportunity to start working on yourself. But for now, let’s look at what the academic literature has to say about breaking codependency.

Given what we know about codependent adult children, it can be seen as a form of learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is when one feels helpless to whatever pain or pleasure comes their

way in a situation and thus they do nothing about it. One study, where the term learned helplessness came from, repeatedly shocked dogs through a platform. One group of dogs could press a button to stop the shock. Another group of dogs could do nothing to stop the shock. Later, when they were given a new and only option of jumping through a hole to get away from the platform, the dogs that had learned they had the power to stop the shock would jump to the safe platform. The dogs who previously couldn't stop the shock wouldn't even try to jump away. It was, well, shocking to researchers as the dogs clearly now had a way to avoid being shocked but did nothing. It's like the dog assumed the platform on the other side of the hole would shock them as well. Since they were no longer willing to explore (learned helplessness), they never realized they could now prevent themselves from being in pain (Seligman & Maier, 1967). Even with their adult status, the codependent adult child has learned at a young age (given the virtually absolute power the parents had over them as children) that they will always be controlled by their narcissistic parents through subtle manipulation and emotional abuse. They learn to "stay put," dependent on them for support, and "be a good boy."

However, the modern literature shows that frequency of reward (that does not necessarily mean the average, per se) or lack of it is what determines if an individual will become helpless or be able to break away from learned helplessness (Teodorescu & Erev, 2014). For example, if a game, by chance, doesn't reward a player for their efforts enough (even though the programmed average should have rewarded them more and would reward them more often if they kept at it) or if the rewards are too far spread out, they are very likely to stop playing. However, if a game rewards a player frequently for their efforts, they are very likely to continue playing. Not surprising at all. However, when the latter group is first yoked (essentially, given absence of control like the dogs), they are able to break away from learned helplessness with frequent rewards from exploring. Overall, it showed the frequency of reward was the best predictor of more exploratory behavior when compared to other factors, even when compared to perceived control. True to this study, Seligman's yoked dogs didn't try jumping platforms to avoid the

electric shocks until an assistant physically moved them (reward from exploration) *several* times in a row (frequency) to show that they could avoid the pain now by jumping away.

But learned helplessness can also come from the reward/pleasure itself. For example, if someone gets rewards that they haven't earned and doesn't get rewards that they have earned, they learn to be helpless to the situation (Brooks, 2012). They learn they have no control over life's rewards/pleasures and decide to do nothing about it. The parent who provides for the adult child regardless of the child's actions might be serving to help to create their child's dependent nature. So not only does any unpredictable emotional abuse that the narcissistic parent gives the child because they didn't meet their unreasonable expectations help to create learned helplessness but so does manipulative rewards. For example, providing him or her physical rewards they did not earn (e.g. tasty food, shelter, video games, etc.) to keep them home and denying status rewards they did earn (e.g. parents breaking their end of a promise of helping the child to get a car or a place of their own after graduating) so they can't move away can create that learned helplessness in the child. And the offspring has little reason to explore outside the home for bigger rewards, like a car, because the child won't get that reward on their own without a lot of time and a lot of work (i.e. the reward is too infrequent). Given this dysfunctional situation, it suggests the child has to get *greatly* satisfying rewards of their *own* efforts *outside* the narcissistic parental relationship, *frequently*, to break away. That sounds like a tall order. Essentially, the narcissistic parent intuitively knows how to keep the child "helpless" at home and dependent on them. But, unlike a dog, you can use information to stop staying put.

So what is the fulfilling reward that can be frequently earned by the CACs to break them away from their codependency with their narcissistic parents and learned helplessness? Talking. Talking to someone outside the dysfunctional relationship can be the frequent reward one needs. Talking to a friend or someone who will genuinely listen about your life lights up the reward center of the brain,

even when talking about painful memories (Semerdjiev, n.d.; Sachs, Damasio, & Habibi, 2015). This will teach the CAC to start reaching out for help instead of relying on their controlling parents or pursuing lower level rewards like playing video games. Furthermore, talking about our lives helps us to process the events in our past and our current situation. This processing is never allowed with the narcissistic parent. “The echo child [the child striving to be a good and perfect reflection of their narcissistic parent] learns, the hard way, to keep their feelings, problems, mistakes, questions, and opinions to themselves, or face severe disapproval, rejection and punishment from their narcissistic parent.” And talking to the narcissistic parent about serious issues might do more harm than good as they might take that vulnerable moment to inject bad ideas into the CAC’s head. But talking to those outside the dysfunctional relationship and who are right-minded can also help us rewrite bad programming or scripts we hold onto from our narcissistic parents. The prolonged success of psychotherapy (talk therapy) seems to support this (Carr, 2007). It also helps with the inner work. By forcing the individual to put their thoughts to words and coherent sentences, it helps the individual to figure out what they really want in life (*Begin with the End in Mind*) and to prioritize their actions for the day and their life (*Put First Things First*). That only leaves the last part up to the codependent adult child: start doing what needs to be done (*Be Proactive*), which will probably be easier once they know what it is they want out of life.

But if talking itself is rewarding, perhaps there are other ways to get it without therapy that will also motivate the CAC to get away from the parents. Keep in mind, we are social creatures. We crave meaningful social interaction. The reward part of the brain is wired for it (Bhanji & Delgado, 2013). For example, the pleasure center of our brain lights up more if we spend our *own* money on a friend rather than someone else’s as long as it results in more interaction with that friend (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2014). Keep in mind, we could keep our money and still spend more time and money on our friends, but our desire to give and help others is that strong. We are social creatures. And the more isolated we become the more we crave social interactions and that desire might manifest in dysfunctional ways. This

could explain the rise of the pickup culture (a subculture that gives advice to men on how to be with a woman, despite the fact men have been successfully doing it without such advice for the entire history of mankind before the information age, but it does so to the point of using or even abusing women) as people want to connect, especially with the opposite sex. However, as modern people find themselves more isolated from the communal living we evolved from by being in rural and suburb areas and using only technology instead of social interactions as entertainment it becomes harder to know how to communicate with people, much less the opposite sex. Perhaps the codependent adult child can go to a social gathering to get that rewarding experience and social training. But if the codependent adult child goes to the bar or nightclub alone (assuming they have no friends to go with) and fails to get any rewarding social interaction, instead he is stressed, sadden, tired, and depressed from the lack of *meaningful* social interactions that night, then he or she is likely to over time, because of the lack of frequent reward, give up and stay home at their parents. At least at their parents' they can have more control over their situation and get other rewards more frequently (like playing their favorite video games, eating their favorite foods, or watching movies). However, as social creatures, those rewards can't compare to social interaction. This could explain the emptiness experienced by many CACs. In regards to codependency, adult children who spend their entire lives playing video games and watching TV and isolating themselves from social interactions would make for an excellent study.

*Hikikomori*, adult children who live entirely in their room using technology as entertainment as their parents enable them to do so (e.g. bring food to them, do their laundry, etc.), would clearly be seen as an extreme form of codependent adult children. Most believe hikikomori is the result of a child crumbling underneath the extreme pressure of Asian societies and parents wanting them to be successful. This is similar to how the narcissistic parents want their child to be perfect. While most of the literature argues about what the true cause of hikikomori is, few studies address effective treatment. One study that does notes a jogging treatment they believe to have cured a hikikomori (Nishida, Kikuchi,



Fukuda, & Kato, 2015). They were even able to show measurable changes in the brain before and after treatment. However, the study notes that for each jogging session he would meet with the same instructor. They met 3 times a week, jogging for 30 minutes around the University athletic grounds. In total, it was about 14 weeks or 42 times that they jogged together. After several sessions (frequency) and interacting with and probably opening up about his life to the clinician (reward), he decided to get a job and move out of his parent's house. While exercise is certainly beneficial to the brain, especially in regards to depression (Phillips, 2017), I believe it was the social interaction and the possible talk therapy where the real healing took place. And talk therapy itself, especially when talking about emotional events, has also been shown to change the structure and activity of the brain (Moustafa, 2013).

You have to ask yourself what is going to be more rewarding, finding a person you can talk to in confidence so that you can easily and repeatedly open up to him or her about things in your life, or going to a bar where you *might* find some stranger to talk to that is probably drunk and who you will probably never see again? Sure, the CAC could go to social outings and group activities that don't involve alcohol or drugs; however, it was most likely the *lack* of social skills that allowed them to become an adult child from their narcissistic parents' behavior in the first place. That means he or she is very unlikely to be able to find a friend at such group activities or sustain a meaningful relationship. Again, talk therapy with a professional who will listen is probably a better approach. Since the hikikomori are seen as the worst case of codependent adult children, let's keep looking in the literature for treatments.

In another study looking to find the root cause of hikikomori, it took a novel approach. They talked one-on-one to individuals from a small but very accurate sample size. They talked to the hikikomori in such a way that allowed them to open up about their condition on their own terms, even if that meant having multiple sessions and even if it had to last for hours before they talked about being

hikikomori (Yong & Kaneko, 2016). This informal, indirect interview made a big difference in how they interacted with them as the study noted: “All the informants claimed that this was the first time they had told their stories to others.”

By using open, non-directional questions and keeping the setting informal, it encouraged “the informants to talk freely about their experiences without any restrictions.” They would also use caring questions like, “How are you feeling?” In addition to this, they made sure to have the informant’s answers “repeated back to them to encourage them to ponder on their thoughts and to share further.” For example, “Hikikomori: Society says what is good and what is not [...] so if you can’t go with [society’s] flow, you are the evil one... Interviewer: But I thought you said you didn’t see yourself as a bad person? Hikikomori: Sure I’m not, but in the eyes of society I am, because I think too differently to be able to go with the others.” This created a non-judgmental mirror and showed that the interviewer was testing their understanding.

While it is interesting to note that the hikikomori said they felt their lifestyle wasn’t an option but their only choice, even more interesting is the fact that, and what was *not* the purpose of the study, it caused a male hikikomori to heal. Of the 8 selected for in-depth interviews (some hikikomori, some former hikikomori, and some with a hikikomori relative), 4 were male. Of the 4 only 3 were currently hikikomori. True to their nature, they did not do face-to-face interviews. Of the 3, one only had 3 email exchanges, one had a significant amount of interaction (12 Skype chats, lasting 2-8 hours), and the last had 3 combined social interactions (a 10-minute Skype call, 2 Skype chats). Given what we know, it was probably the hikikomori who had the 12 long Skype chats who recovered as it re-enforces the idea of frequent reward from repeated social interactions, space to explore your own ideas, and time to reflect on one’s life. “[H]e revealed that apparently the unstructured interviews had allowed him to review what happened to him in the past. In doing so, he discovered what he really wanted and decided to

move on. [...] The dialogue helped him to reflect on himself and this helped him to decide what to do next.”

Carl Rogers, one of the most influential psychotherapists of his time, wouldn't be surprised at the result. If one were to watch one of his therapy sessions, it would be clear that he isn't pushy at all, allows the patient to open up at their own pace, and allows them to come to their own conclusions. And at the heart of his person-centered therapy is reflective listening which requires *empathic listening* and *testing understanding* (Arnold, 2014), something we would expect a good friend to do. This hikikomori study seemed to have accidentally used Carl Roger's most powerful weapon as a psychologist. It's no mistake that the literature in the field recommends something similar when it comes to healing children of narcissistic parents: “a healthy, truthful mirror of the client's inherent beauty that is not based on what they do, but who they are” (McLarnan, n.d.).

But will what worked for the hikikomori work for the codependent adult child in the western world? The hikikomori study points out a striking amount of similarities between hikikomori and CACs with narcissistic parents. The informants felt “powerless to change,” “they could see no way out,” and “feelings of being helpless in the world” (learned helplessness); reported difficulty coping with the real world, like job demands, and seeing the world as a harsh place thus having to stay home to make it (codependency); limited social abilities and no relationship with others besides parents (no outside person to ask for help); their own analysis of the academic literature showed “post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of parenting style” but not necessarily a traumatic event (dysfunctional parenting, repressive family atmosphere, physical and verbal abuses, authoritarian parenting style, and/or enmeshment); that it develops from environmental and personal factors, *not* from genetic mental illness (arrested development); it has been associated with maternal panic disorder (maternal compulsion); and “introverted personality plays a crucial role in a person becoming a hikikomori” (lack of

communication). The western CAC with narcissistic parents and the eastern hikikomori are the same person. The hikikomori simply manifests their dysfunction in an easier to spot situation (not leaving their rooms). But most importantly, the hikikomori study showed that codependent adult children, even in extreme cases, can be cured with talk therapy. It just needs time and space. They can be healed by “introducing a relaxed social environment that [they] can control” and just by getting to know them, which allows them to get to know themselves. In other words, introduce “talking sessions that allow hikikomori to express themselves freely with the goal of facilitating self-reflection” (Yong & Kaneko, 2016).

The codependent adult child must examine their personal story at their own pace if they are to grow. They must look inside. To change, they must be given something controlling parents would never allow. A child, even an adult one, must be allowed to come to their *own* realizations about their life. And one of those realizations is that it’s okay to make mistakes. “The [child’s] beauty is flawed, imperfect, and prone to all sorts of mistakes, and miss-steps; but these are to be accepted, and learned from, not feared. That is the truth that will finally set the echo child free” (McLarnan, n.d.). And we see a remarkable decrease in learned helplessness when making mistakes and learning from those mistakes are accepted and encouraged in a low reward environment, especially in the presence of good leadership (Boichuk, 2014). But good leadership can become even worse than bad leadership overtime for learned helplessness when mistakes aren’t allowed. Perhaps it becomes a situation where the leaders are simply seen as superior and it can’t be helped. But allowing for mistakes and encouraging learning from them gives people room to grow, mature, and become independent. So while having ideal role model parents *might* be good for the child, even better, and perhaps necessary, are parents who are okay with their child making mistakes and learning from them on their own. It’s a type of unconditional love and independence the codependent adult child with narcissistic parents has never really known.

And it's been shown that the parent's failure mindset—whether mistakes are seen as unacceptable or good learning opportunities—determines if the child will have a fixed or the highly coveted growth mindset (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). It's the whole praising for ability (being perfect from the start) or praising for effort (encouraging improving with time) that plays a key role in whether the child gets better at something (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). And we all know which group the narcissistic parent falls into. But you can rewrite that script in your head. Don't demand perfection from yourself at the start like your parents did. Tell yourself that you *can* improve with time and with proper treatment you will.

### **Treatment**

But how much time and space is needed for the codependent adult child to find their own answers to life and improve their situation? While many therapists in the field would probably give the blanket response that each individual is unique, I think we can give the CAC a reasonable range of time to expect to improve their situation.

Before I give an answer let's address another topic: technology. Just how hikikomori came about with the rise in technology, I think the increased usage of the terms "adult children" and "emerging adulthood" with the information age is no coincidence. With Netflix, Hulu, YouTube, smartphones ("there's an app for that"), and other entertaining Internet of Things devices, who would want to leave the comfort of their parent's house and live in the real world? While not the cause of codependency, modern technology allows the adult child to deny their actual circumstances by escaping reality. This hinders self-reflection and prevents them from finding frequent rewards *outside* the codependent relationship, and, thus, prolongs their codependent state.

(Not only has modern technology (smartphones, tablets, etc.) and screen time in general been disturbingly linked to a massive increase in social isolation, depression, and suicide but social media, at

least in regards to Facebook, has been shown to *cause* unhappiness (Twenge, 2017). Thus, seeking therapy for internet addiction for the CACs who need it would probably also be a good idea.)

One study looking to treat internet addiction used Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT, therapy where they talk about their behaviors and thoughts) saw success after 12 weekly sessions (Young, 2007). The vast majority of them were actually cured in 8 weeks but a little bit more were cured in 12. After a 6 month follow-up, just about everyone stayed cured. The study said it chose 12 weekly sessions as that is how long CBT usually takes to work. Specifically, it said: “CBT usually requires three months of treatment or approximately 12 weekly sessions.” This aligns very well with our hikikomori studies (12 Skype sessions and 14 weeks jogging/talking with a clinician).

And in treating codependent adult children (absent the presence of mental illness or drug addiction) 8 to 12 weeks (2 to 3 months) is probably a reasonable range of time needed. So that means you can’t just go to 3 sessions and expect to be cured or even to see progress by then. Change is a process. While long, the codependent adult should be happy to know it should only take one summer, not years, to change their situation for the better.

However, in choosing a therapist, regardless if they use person-centered therapy or CBT, it is important to find one that gives you space to explore your own thoughts and feelings. It isn’t simply the frequent reward of being able to converse with someone we are going for but also the ability to get some perspective on your current, dysfunctional living situation. And the only one who can really find that perspective, the only one who has lived in your shoes, is you. So if someone is pushing techniques or psychological tools on you (e.g. meditation, visualization, etc.), while they might be of some help, they often just serves to keep you from getting to the root of your problem. Unfortunately, some psychologists only care about how many sessions (money) they can get out of you.

## **Friends**

If one simply needs multiple talking sessions with someone who is patient and understanding, couldn't a friend fit the bill? If the friend doesn't have an agenda, like narcissistic parents do, absolutely. However, keep in mind, the child most likely became a codependent adult child, unlike their siblings, because they had little or no friends to turn to for help in regards to their relationship with their narcissistic parents. While they might have friends or many friends (for example, on social media), they probably lack *quality* friends. Many define quality friends as those they can open up to about intimate issues. Quality friends are also a critical factor in life satisfaction (Gillespie, Lever, Frederick, & Royce, 2015). Furthermore, it appears to be harder to make friends the older we get. These are *adult* children we are talking about here. And it is probably their lifelong lack of social skills that kept them from getting friends and keeps them in their room without friends.

Essentially, we have a negative feedback loop (a system that returns you back to where you were, e.g. a codependent adult child). To develop social skills, one needs to be social. The few times they get the courage to be social, they fail. Their lack of rewards/success in being social causes them to suffer or reinforce learned helplessness and to return to their room dependent on their parents. This all adds to the idea that they can never win in the real world and should just give up.

To break this cycle, a new cycle needs to be introduced. We need a positive feedback loop (a system that causes growth/change). By seeing a good therapist weekly, they are regularly rewarded when it comes to opening up about their past. They practice talking to another human being besides their parents or immediate family while sorting out their current situation. It could also help them to realize the best path to start making quality friendships, such as starting a new job or finding a group activity they have a high interest in.

Either that or you can wait for, as what happened to the main character on the TV show *Arrested Development*, some painful catalyst to force change on you (and chances are it will happen

eventually). Not only will it be painful but the event could emotionally scar you for life. I think a wise person would choose to be proactive instead and seek for a positive feedback loop right now.

### **Alternatives**

Besides having a friend to talk to are there any good alternatives to one-on-one therapy? As long as frequent reward and time and space to talk about one's life situation are given, yes, there are alternatives. One thought is group therapy. We know cathartic experiences, like opening up about our past, is rewarding to our brain, but listening other people's stories that we can relate to is also cathartic (Semerdjiev, n.d.) and, thus, rewarding. So listening to other people's abusive stories about narcissistic parents will be, oddly enough, beneficial to the CAC. But one wouldn't expect there to be a group for codependent adult children like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Actually, there is. As mentioned earlier, Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families has group therapy sessions and a 12 step program similar to AA. However, as I also said before, be careful if they spend most of their time pushing their techniques or psychological tools on you. What you need are people to help you sort out your life by listening to you, showing empathy, being understanding, and *not* manipulating you like your parents do. As each group pretty much runs independently while having to follow a few guidelines (think Toastmasters), you might have to go to several before you find one that clicks (similar to finding a good therapist).

With the internet, it is possible to find therapists you can talk to on the phone or over the computer using apps like Skype, Talkspace, or BetterHelp. While there do seem to be some additional benefits with face-to-face interactions you won't find on phone calls or on instant messenger (again, we are social creatures), something is better than nothing. And a phone call or even just texting might be enough to make a difference. Remember, a hikikomori healed just by doing 12 long instant messaging chats about his life.



Now, there might be a co-worker, mentor, neighbor, or someone you already know that could lend an ear. However, getting that *frequent* reward by making sure you talk to them often enough would be hard to guarantee. Again, it's probably best to seek a professional, a professional group, or something with more structure to break you out of your codependency.

Finally, one can journal. While it is probably best to do journaling in *supplement* to any of the treatments above (once again, we are social creatures; thus, you probably need someone to listen to your explanations for you to best reflect on them), it is still better than nothing. Journaling does seem to be rewarding to people, helps them to handle stress, and there seems to be a lot of other benefits in regards to journaling (Grate, 2015). But most important of all for the CAC, journaling helps us to process current events and get perspective on their life. And reflective journaling will most likely help you to create a growth mindset (Korstange, 2016). Finally, journaling was used along with the CBT in the Internet Addiction study that resulted in a successful treatment (Young, 2007).

### **Communication**

I have a theory: the more you communicate with people (about your personal life) the more likely you are to ask for help and sort stuff out. If this is true, then the victims of narcissistic parents are most likely the children that communicated the least. (Remember, introversion was a critical factor if someone became a hikikomori or not.) Whether it's because you are shy or have an introverted personality, it doesn't really matter. The important thing is that you start communicating more with people besides your parents. Communication is a skill. And like any skill, the more you do it the more you will improve at it. Take on that growth mindset. And communication can come in a lot of forms nowadays. It could be a phone call, a text message, an online group, or some new app online. There is evidence that quality friendships can start online *if* they are worked on and sustained over time because what really matters is psychological, not physical, closeness (Amichai-Hamburger, Kingsbury, &

Schneider, 2013). (But, remember, social media, like Facebook, is probably not the best platform to go about it.) Or you could do some type of physical activity that people will want to do with you (like jogging) and talk to them about your life while doing it. It worked for that one hikikomori. The point is there are a lot of options out there. And the more you do it, the more likely you'll keep doing it. And the more you get used to communicating, the more likely you'll reach out to people for help when you need it. Furthermore, a good friend is probably likely to encourage you to go to psychotherapy if you really need it.

And if you make a mistake while communicating, that's okay. The important thing is that you learn from it. Apology if you need to. If they won't accept your apology, learn what you can from it and move on. But don't stop trying to communicate with people. Again, have a growth, not fixed, mindset. But to grow, you actually have to *do* what you are trying to improve at. If you want to grow, you have to get a little bit uncomfortable; you have to get out of your comfort zone for a bit.

Don't forget the other hikikomori study. It said that communicating is what probably caused the shut-in to change for the better as he said it allowed him to reflect on what he wanted in life (Yong & Kaneko, 2016). Keep in mind, the healing for that hikikomori came from either Skype chats or emails. So focus on increasing your communication, even if it is online. Furthermore, like the interviewers in the hikikomori study, it's probably best if you take a genuine interest in people first ("How are you feeling?") because that's how you get them to open up to you and become your friend. As what one of Stephen Covey's seven habits says, *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood*. Or, as another self-help guru said, *if you want to be interesting, be interested*. If you want someone to listen and give space to your life story, you probably need to listen and give space to their life story first. But don't get caught up in comparing your life to theirs, like many do on social media. Just listen with an empathic ear.

So you don't necessarily have to have face-to-face interactions to heal your life. But what you do need is frequency and space. What you need is someone who will listen. What you need is to start talking to people about your life.

## **Hope**

Central to being happy is having hope. Actually, hope is one of the few ways you can train yourself to become happier. The literature follows the idea that once people develop goals and believe that they can achieve them, hope and positive emotions are created and sustained. Central to this is to avoid *false* hope syndrome. False hope syndrome often occurs when "one believes that changing their behavior is easy and the outcome of the change will be evidenced in a short period of time." This eventually creates disappointment and a sense of hopelessness, or what we have been calling learned helplessness. And hopelessness undermines happiness ("Well-being contributing factors," n.d.).

But there *is* hope. You have a structured plan to follow. If a hikikomori can heal, so can you. But change takes time. Change is a process. Don't create a false hope in your mind. Follow the plan and give it time. Find someone to talk to. Give it three months. Start reflecting on your life in a good, productive way. There is hope. You just need to stick to the process.

## **Conclusion**

While psychotherapy probably isn't the answer most CACs are looking for, you've probably known all along the need to talk to someone about your problem, the need to go to a professional, and that a quick fix can't ever compare to the slow process of change and self-discovery. Stephen Covey warns against seeking and using pop psychology. Instead, he says you should seek to find universal and timeless principles. Then to improve your life you must pay the price by *actually* doing them. The

codependent adult child has to realize that they always had the power to change the situation. But change won't come overnight.

Change takes time. The good news is there is a clear path to take. You don't have to worry about it or search for it anymore. Trust the process. A summer's worth of psychological work should be all that it takes. Find someone to talk to. Find a group or a therapist. But as much as talk therapy will help you to realize what your real life goals are and to put the important things first, only you can be the one to do them. Remember, what really made someone into a codependent adult child probably wasn't the narcissistic parent but, rather, the fact the child wasn't willing to ask for help from someone *outside* the relationship when they needed it. Don't let the stigma of talk therapy stop you now.

As the Urban Dictionary definition finished on: "wish[ing] things will change without them putting in the effort. They will remain the same – they are truly lost."

Go ask for help.

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